





WHY US?

"The book and the planning had us all captivated. It generated fabulous work, tears and delight. Highly recommend."

Rebecca Dowsett, Year 6 teacher

FEATURES

- **Ø** Planning
- Classroom visuals
- (V) CPD
- ✓ App
- Link Consultant

Welcome...

How many children in your class struggle with handwriting? It's a problem that teachers have been mentioning to literacy advisors Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton with worrying regularity. On page 9 you can find out more about the underlying issues behind this trend, and why we need to be rethinking how we teach letter formation — right from the beginning.

On page 60 we share a charming conversation between *Inkheart* author Cornelia Funke and her publisher, Barry Cunningham. It's a fascinating insight into the journey of a beloved story from an author's mind to the bestsellers lists.

If you struggle to know where to start when teaching new vocabulary, Christopher Youles offers some useful and practical advice on how to create bespoke word lists (page 56). He also discusses why 'wow words' can cause problems, and how to make conversations about word choices a regular part of your lessons.

Knowing *when* to begin is one of the things Emma Spiers clarifies in her step-by-step guide to teaching Phase 5 phonics (page 35). She's put together some handy worksheets to accompany the article as well, which you can download from teachwire.com – along with hundreds more invaluable literacy resources.

Our regular '10 books...' feature from Carey Fluker Hunt (page 39) brings together some super – and important – stories about divorce, separation and blended families. It's reassuring to know that whatever children are going through, there's a book that can help them.

On page 7, author A M Dassu explains just how impactful representation is for children, particularly during periods when the media may seem set on portraying them in a poor light.

Finally, we have words of wisdom – and detailed teaching notes – from classroom teachers, literacy experts and children's authors, all aimed at helping you and your class get the most out of every book you share together.

Happy reading – and writing!

Practical teaching tips and expert advice from classroom teachers and literacy leaders



PIE CORBETT
Entering a dragon's lair
is not without its risks...
p.24



CHRISTOPHER YOULES
"I want to suck your blood!" postulated the vampire' is poor writing...
p.56



CORNELIA FUNKE
I hadn't realised how
much I missed them all...
p.60



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Discover scaffolding strategies that will give multilingual learners a real confidence boost

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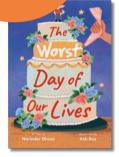




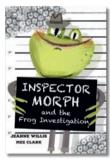


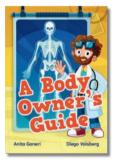


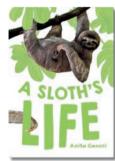


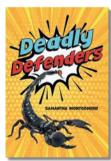




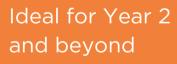
















Scan to find out more



"This is what drives me to write..."

A. M. Dassu discusses language and representation in the classroom in a time of media bias, disinformation and relentless bad news

ords matter. We've all heard the adage, 'sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me', but in reality, they do, and they have a monumental impact on the way society interacts. A flippant "You're fat!" can cause a young person to lose confidence in their body image for the rest of their lives. A comment on someone's skin colour can result in them never aspiring to reach their potential because, they feel they'll never belong.

What we saw unfold in the UK this

summer shocked many of us to our core. The racism and hatred that we thought had been buried and moved past has resurfaced. And I would say that the fault lies squarely with our politicians and media.

Because when they use language irresponsibly, the consequences can be devastating.

All my books have been inspired by the news. More specifically, news that doesn't tell a full story, but is distorted - platforming only one viewpoint or a minority opinion. Politicians and the media have been peddling a false narrative, to fuel fear, for years.

I wrote my novel Boy, Everywhere in response to this divisive rhetoric. It's a story that shows we are all one cruel twist of fate away from becoming refugees ourselves. Meanwhile, Fight Back is about being proud of your identity and finding the courage to fight to express it. My latest book, Kicked Out, explores immigration, belonging and the influence of social media on rising racist narratives. And more importantly, it shows that when we come together, we're stronger in the face of hatred and injustice.

Words have wings

We saw young people taking part in riots this summer, chanting hateful, extreme language. Some damaging words take only seconds to utter, but their impact is real and long-lasting.

Such words collect and take flight, reaching further and further, leaving devastation in their path. That's why it's more important than ever to discuss how words are weaponised and how harmful they can be. I wonder, if those young people had been taught about the impact of words and choosing them carefully, would they have been emboldened to join those riots as passionately?

As much as we want to protect them, children are exposed to global, national, even community-level events,

"Damaging words take only seconds to utter, but their impact is real and long-lasting"

> not just via the news, but through exposure to social media, or even by overhearing the commentary of adults in their lives. They might feel scared or that they have no control over the environment they live in. This is why it's vital that we give young people the tools to feel empowered and show them that they can use their voices to bring positive change.

Looking in the mirror

It's so important for children to feel seen in books. Childhood is a time in your life that can really shape the choices you make later. Young people want to make sense of the world they're in and their own place in it, and books can really help them to understand and tackle difficult themes that they will be aware of through the news, their peers and perhaps their own experiences.

Unfortunately, there are lots of children who experience discrimination, stereotyping and microaggressions, who live with violent or controlling family members, who get called names, etc. A book can literally be life-changing if a child can see themself in it, or if they realise they



have something in common with those who seemed different.

Resetting the narrative

In replaying historic racist tropes, media representation significantly

> influences the way certain groups are perceived by society. It's only through adequate representation that we can learn about and from different lives and cultures, and hopefully bring people together. This is what drives me to write: the hope that my stories will

show children that there is nothing to fear, that there are indeed other sides to the stories they are being told: ones in which they can see themselves portrayed, and through which they can aspire and dream.

My desire is for as many people as possible to lend their voices and speak up against the injustices we witness. Now is the time to discuss what we need to do to build a more empathetic society, and to show young people the power of words and how they can use them effectively as they move through life.

A. M. Dassu is the internationally acclaimed author of Boy, Everywhere, Fight Back and Kicked Out, which have collectively been listed for over 50 awards. She is a director at Inclusive Minds, which is an organisation for people who are passionate about inclusion, diversity, equality and accessibility in children's literature.

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The handwriting CRISIS

We need to rethink our priorities when it comes to teaching children how to write, say **Christine Chen** and **Lindsay Pickton**

n over 20 years of looking at children's handwriting, we have seen a constant correlation between reluctant writers, or those who make slow progress, and non-fluent handwriting.

We're not talking here about tidiness: immaculate script can be non-fluent. The crucial factor is ease of movement – the flow from mind to page. Transcription ability is the filter through which ideas must pass; you can have the best ideas and vocabulary, but if you have a dodgy filter, you will produce poor writing.

Stronger writers

After the COVID lockdowns, we received many requests for support with writing stamina; to an extent, these have continued. Writing stamina results from multiple feature.

push non-fluent children to write more, we are ensuring a discomforting experience while probably maximising practice of the incorrect movements — making them harder to correct in the future. Because so much of handwriting is motor-memory, the sooner good habits are formed, the better: it's so much harder to teach good formation in upper KS2.

Unfortunately, when a child is five, good formation isn't always as legible as poorly formed but carefully picked-out letters, and EYFS practitioners need to be able to read what's written to assess a child's encoded GPCs. There isn't an easy solution to this problem, but we must always remember that when a child uses incorrect movements to form things that look like letters,

these will not spontaneously self-correct one day. Rather, because of frequency of practice, poor movement is likely to become ingrained.

We need a shift in mindset, away from how nice writing looks, to a process of freeing up the thinking. The less a child has to think about their handwriting, the more of your amazing teaching will end up on the page. Another way of looking at this might be to consider that if more children have genuinely fluent handwriting, more of them will achieve greater depth in their writing.

"The crucial factor is ease of movement – the flow from mind

In handwriting. fluency of movement is the priority, then neatness, with prettiness much later. Wildly messy handwriting is problematic - communication is the goal, and a child's self-esteem as a writer often suffers if they feel humiliated by their script. But if a child is focusing on how lovely their writing looks (think unnecessarily swirly tails, or circles over 'i's) they can't be thinking about content or sentence structure as much as they could - it's a law of cognitive load.

Rules for writing

So, which handwriting schemes are the best? We prefer to stick to a list of key principles that should make any scheme work.

Firstly, adults and children should all understand that the primary



goal is easy flow from mind to page, not letters that look lovely. The latter can be developed once fluent movements are secured. This single mindset change can be the difference between a handwriting approach that isn't working and one that does.

Assess children's physical strength - on both small and large scale - in all year groups, not just at Foundation Stage. Ensure there are frequent opportunities for all pupils to use scissors, make small models, get better at colouring; also look at climbing, swinging, monkey-barring, crawling (from the toes, not knees), wheelbarrow races and the like. Keep in mind that if a child can't sustain an upright position at a desk, they will likely lose control of their pencil.

Teach letters as movements, rather than end-products; praise accuracy of movement, not nice-looking representations of letters. Teach letters in movement families too; The National Handwriting Association has useful advice if your scheme doesn't go down this route.

Remember as Keep in mind too that well that joining handwriting practice is letters isn't about the development of a goal: it's automatic movements, not a means lovely-looking letters. The towards idea is to get to the stage greater where the letters form without thought, freeing up focus on content and expression. Therefore, judge handwriting to actual writing; handwriting practice is like ball skills in

fluency. When children believe joining is the goal, they may go back and add false joins afterwards - surely the opposite of fluency! Accurate movements flow towards the next letter, mostly, making many joins happen easily.

Does practice make perfect?

Handwriting practice must always be accompanied by teaching, in order that correct movements are imitated. Without

football practice: building automatic movements so you can think about 'the match'.

A lot of handwriting practice is too long. If you see a few well-made letters followed by some iffy ones, then bad ones, the practice was too long and may have compounded bad habits. If we aren't monitoring everyone closely (almost impossible in a class), it's better to keep practice very short; make it more frequent instead.

Consider a brief movement-reminder followed by a very short handwriting

"It's better to keep practice very short; make it more frequent instead"

instruction and modelling, children may imitate outcomes rather than movements. Some form of looped animation will reinforce the movement during practice. Regard line-guides as being like floats in swimming lessons or cones in ball-sport drills - they are useful props and reminders, but can't be depended upon forever.

improvement when applied

practice, in the exercise book pupils will be using, at the start of any lesson in which they'll be writing. This has huge time-saving benefits while also sharpening skills before 'real' writing.

Keep it moving

As soon as possible, link handwriting practice with high-frequency word spelling, as both depend on motor-memory, and both contribute to fluency of thought onto the page. When children achieve true fluent legibility, their handwriting practice should shift to improving speed without sacrificing their style.

Finally, when children seem to be lagging, use the language of personal bests rather than comparisons with peers. Remind pupils of this core principle: we get good at the things we spend most time practising. Give individual letter (or join) targets so that goals are achieved in the short term. Telling a child to "Improve your handwriting" is like a sports coach saying, "Swim faster," or "Score more goals".

HIERARCHIES

Writing is primarily about ideas and content. Then there are sentences, made from well-chosen words. Spelling comes next, so that words are at least recognisable to the reader. Finally, there's handwriting: forming the letters in those spellings.

There's a true hierarchy in that order, but at the point of actually writing, you can flip it. If you have to think about letter formation, you can't think about the rest; if you have to think too hard about spelling, you can't think about sentences or content...

We demonstrated this earlier in the year with 80 teachers and phase leaders. We taught a simple poem by heart, and modelled how this might be innovated to create something new. We led a shared-write to demonstrate the process and provided images to stimulate thinking about potential subject matter, encouraging oral rehearsal before writing. Year 2 children would have been fine. Then we required evervone write with their non-dominant hand, and this room full of highly-educated adults...struggled. About half the room resorted to copying the shared-write. Having to think about transcription took too much cognitive space, and the learning that had been taking place was squeezed out.

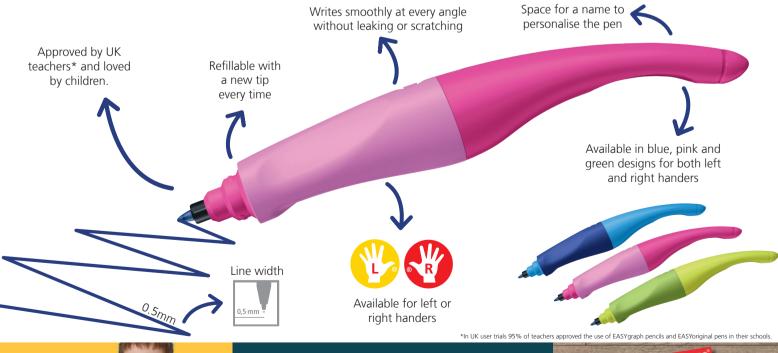


Christine Chen and Lindsay Pickton are primary education advisers (primaryeducationadvisers. co.uk) supporting English development nationally.

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BOOKS ABOUT DIVORCE, SEPARATION and Hended families

If a child is struggling with a difficult situation, seeing their family reflected in a story can be crucially validating and reassuring...

Foundation stage
Families, Families,
Families

BY SUZANNE LANG, ILLUS. MAX LANG, RANDOM HOUSE





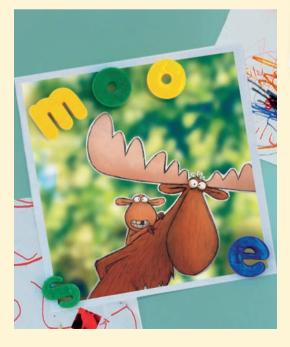
About this book

What makes a family? Two dads? One mum? A stepbrother?

Wickedly observan, but rooted in kindly common sense, this picturebook takes a humorous, animal-themed look at the ways we live together and the things we share.

From cats and dogs, to pandas, walruses and ducks, the groups include single and mixed-race parents, adopted children and blended families. The faces smiling down from the framed portraits prompt cheerful questioning: Who could they be? Are they like me? What do they tell me about the wider world?

Readers will enjoy the contrast between the minimal text statements and the photo-collaged artwork, but the messaging is clear: if you love each other, then you're a family.





FOUNDATION STAGE

One Day at a Time BY RACHEL IP, ILLUS. NATELLE QUEK,



About this book

Every year, Poppy and Robin plant sunflowers and watch them grow. But Mummy and Daddy have split up, and the children have two homes instead of one. What will happen to the flowers now?

Gently, but with emotional truth and insight, this realistic picturebook addresses the impact of separation. Feelings are

recognised and expressed, and the practical impact of living between two homes explored. Sunflowers become a metaphor for continuity amidst change, and the sight of them blooming successfully in two gardens captures the essence of this uplifting book.

Thinking and talking

What changes for Poppy

and Robin? What stays the same?

- Find moments when Poppy and Robin react differently. Why is this?
- How do the characters show their love for each other? How do you show people that you care?

Try this...

Plant sunflowers and record their growth, noting what's happening in school. Once your flowers are fully grown, share key diary moments. focusing on the changes that have happened - to your children, and your plants.

- "We'll have two homes instead of one..." Discuss what changes for Poppy and Robin, and what stavs the same. Make lists for each category and illustrate them.
- "Sometimes their feelings pop out..." What are Poppy and Robin thinking and saying in the park and supermarket? How do their parents respond? Write speech bubbles and add to the spreads.

Thinking and talking

- · Which family in this book is most like yours, and why?
- · How do the families in this book differ? What do they share?
- · Ask these animals some guestions – and make up their answers!

Try this...

- Draw each member of your family. Collage onto a printed photo backdrop and add a frame. Use to make a class book.
- Collect words describing family relationships and display them for reference. How do you think the animals in this book are related? Add labels to the pictures and draw some simple family trees.
- What happens when two of the families from the book meet for a day out? Tell the story!

KEY STAGE 1

Mum and Dad Glue BY KES GRAY, ILLUS. LEE WILDISH. **HACHETTE**

"This picturebook's charming illustrations and bouncy, rhyming text make it fun to share"



About this book

Mum and Dad's marriage is falling apart and needs a strong repair. Maybe a Glue Shop will have just the thing? Their son feels responsible for the split and is desperate to help, until the shop owner explains that some families

will separate, no matter what, but the love parents feel for their children comes with a lifetime guarantee.

This picturebook's charming illustrations and bouncy, rhyming text make it fun to share, but its message is simple, powerful and affecting. Important conversations will follow, in and out of the classroom.

Thinking and talking

- Why does the boy want to stick his mum and dad together?
- What does he learn from the shopkeeper?
- Glue doesn't keep people together. What does?

Try this...

- Draw pictures of Things that Change. Is change bad or good, or both?
- Invent new products to help people. Use empty packaging to make models for a roleplay shop. Create signage and advertising. Who wants to buy something, and why? Take turns at being the customer and shopkeeper.
- Should people stay strong and make the best of things, or give up when it gets tough? Talk about resilience and seeking help. What have you found difficult? Did anyone give you good advice?

4

KEY STAGE 1

Do You Remember?

BY SYDNEY SMITH, WALKER BOOKS



 Find the happiest and saddest pictures in this book. Does everyone agree? Why not?



About this book

Tucked up in bed in a room that doesn't feel like home, a boy and his mum share memories of the life – and person – they've left behind. What's brought them to this place, and what will happen next?

The conversational text (red for Mum, blue for the boy) reads naturally, and children will relate to these memories, if not always to their context.

Richly coloured sensory illustrations evoke moments in time, experienced from unusual angles, each one full of questions, possibilities and hidden depths. This intriguingly beautiful picturebook repays close attention and guided exploration, but will satisfy a casual reader, too.

Thinking and talking

- What do Mum and the boy remember? What memories would you share?
- Why didn't Dad come with them? Is it possible to know for sure?



KEY STAGE 1

Pearl and her Bunch
BY MOMOKO ABE, ORCHARD BOOKS



"Are you sure her parents look big and round and yellow?"

"Of course, they do," said Pearl,

"Gracel Gracel"

The big yellow fruit

lurned and cried...

About this book

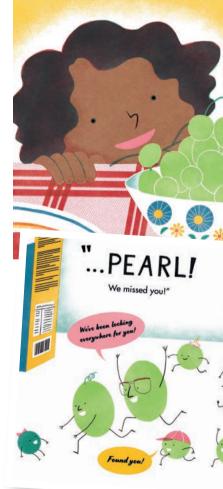
Stylish, full of heart and bursting with humour and insight, this entertaining picturebook takes an unusual look at identity, belonging and community.

The Grape family are a REALLY big bunch, but Pearl adores their famous group hug – until the day she learns that she isn't a grape at all, but a PEA. How will she get her head around THIS? Still smarting from her discovery, Pearl attempts to unite a lost fruit with its parents, but it takes several failed attempts before Pearl's friend Carlos the Carrot points out the obvious – you don't have to look like

Thinking and talking

your family to belong.

 What does Pearl assume about the lost fruit's parents? What mistakes does she make

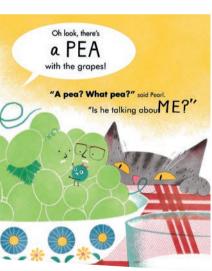




"A boy and his mum share memories of the life they've left behind"

Try this...

- Examine the images of Mum and the boy leaving home. How many questions could you ask about these pictures and events? Invent lots of answers, then write about what happened.
- Can you invent more memories?
 Use a picture of Mum and the boy facing each other, to inspire new roleplay conversations.
- "And we weren't worried or scared..." Write or tell a story about what happens to them next.





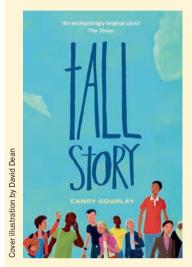
in this assumption?

- Which vegetables are part of Carlos' family? Do they look alike?
- What does Pearl mean when she says, "You can just feel it when you're with your real family"?

Try this...

- Look at Pearl being reunited with her Bunch. Some grapes are talking, others aren't. Write speech bubbles for the quiet ones, then roleplay the scene, bringing everyone to life.
- Working from life, draw and paint lots of different fruits and vegetables. Can you group them? Try using different rules for sorting. How do your groups change?
- Make grapes from modelling materials. Give them faces and names, and display in a bowl. What does Pearl know about her Bunch? Use Pearl's voice to introduce each member of her family.

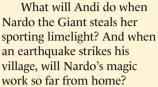




About this book

When Mum takes a job in the UK, Bernardo stays in the Philippines. When he finally gets his visa, it's been years since he met his mum, and in that time Bernardo's grown. A lot. He's also acquired a basketball-mad half-sister and a reputation for working miracles.

"Will Nardo's magic work so far from home?"



This realistic UKS2 novel, with a light sprinkling of magic, explores the blending of a family from two different perspectives.

Thinking and talking

- What role does Nardo's height play in this book? Is it really a tall story?
- What did Nardo and Andi know about each other before they met? How did their expectations play out?
- How do Nardo and Andi change each other's lives?

Try this...

- What do the main characters know about the UK, the Philippines and each other? Present your findings as a report or on a poster.
- At eight feet, Nardo can't blend in, and finds his new school challenging. What problems would he face at your school, and what might he need to know? Write him a guidebook.
- Bernardo and Andi are almost strangers, but discover a shared passion for basketball. Survey your class to collect information about hobbies and interests. What do people have in common?





KEY STAGE 2

The Time of Green Magic
BY HILARY MACKAY, MACMILLAN

About this book

Abi loves reading, but lately books have started feeling much too real. A story covers her in seawater, and there's a cat-like 'wildness' pacing the house that might have escaped from a sketchbook. Louis loves it, but it's growing fiercer, and it won't go back...

When Abi's dad

marries Polly, everything changes. Abi has acquired two stepbrothers without caring about either of them, and sharing Dad just makes her feel all wrong.

With the challenges of a newly blended family at its heart, this engrossing middle-grade novel explores the power of reading, teamwork and our wild imaginations.

Thinking and talking

- "Was she going to have to share Granny Grace... as well as everything else?" What do the new stepsiblings have to share? How do they feel about it?
- "You have to be reading...
 deeply,.... with all of you..."
 Does magic really happen
 when Abi reads, or is it
 something else?

• What turns 'two sets of people that didn't know each other' into a family?

Try this...

- "Iffen the hungry, the untamed, Iffen the great warmth when the shivers came..." Collect information about Iffen's appearance, behaviour and provenance. Use one of Louis' words guest, beast, cat, angel, fear, secret, wildness to help you draw and describe this untameable creature.
- Roleplay Abi and Louis telling Max about Iffen. How does the 'wildness' bring them all together?
- Faced with green magic, Abi says she's "stunned, shocked, chilled to her bones. Astonished. Awed. Lost and found", but eventually settles on privileged. What do these words mean? How do they fit her experiences?

I, Cosmo
BY CARLIE SOROSIAK,
ILLUS. BEN MANTLE,
NOSY CROW



Cover illustration by Ben Mantle

About this book

Mum and Dad keep arguing, and Max has even heard the word *divorce*. Cosmo would do anything to keep his family together, but there are some challenges ahead. He's a senior dog whose legs are getting shaky, and Max is convinced that winning a canine dance contest is the only way to stop the split.

With just the right blend of humour, suspense and heartrending truth, this affecting middle-grade novel prompts us to face change and work with it for good.

"Cosmo would do anything to keep his family together"

Thinking and talking

- Why is this story told from Cosmo's point of view?
- Who makes mistakes? How do they deal with them and what happens as a result?
- What do Max and Cosmo learn by the end of the story? Do other characters learn things, too?

Try this...

- Give Cosmo a voice by roleplaying his interactions with other characters. What impact does Cosmo have on them? If he had spoken to them in the book, would anything have changed?
- Is it Cosmo's responsibility to ensure Mum and Dad's happiness? Write him a letter, explaining what's happening and advising him how best to help his family.
- Draw a map of Cosmo's world. Mark his favourite locations and activities. What changes because of Mum and Dad's decision? What stays the same?



do alone? Talk about rules, responsibilities and risk in the context of the Pride trip.

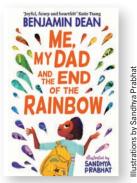
Do people expect Archie to be more adult than he is?

Should children be protected from grown-up problems?

KEY STAGE 2

Me, My Dad and the End of the Rainbow

BY BENJAMIN DEAN, SIMON AND **SCHUSTER**



Try this...

- "If I learned anything... it's that Pride is about family, both the ones you're given and the ones you make ... " Write about your home family, and the friends and community members who are important to you.
- "I took us all in, a group of colourful warriors ready to go to war donning make-up and wigs, glitter and sparkles as our weapons and armour. I felt stronger and safer than I had all day...." Design an outfit to express and celebrate your individuality and interests. Write about what you've chosen and why.



separated, but they're still arguing. Archie's coping - just about - until Dad shares some unexpected news. He's gay. How will Archie get his head around this? Maybe the Pride Parade in London holds the key.

Archie's friends are determined to help, but three lone children in London on one of the busiest days of the

year is asking for trouble...

A sensitive story that raises some thoughtful questions about identity, personal responsibility, community and change.

Thinking and talking

- What is changing for Archie, at home and at school? Would it be better if nothing ever changed?
- · What are you allowed to



Vi Spy: Licence to

BY MAZ EVANS, ILLUS, JEZ TUYA, CHICKEN HOUSE

KEY STAGE 2



"Parental separation and blended families add depth to a light-hearted, action-driven storyline"

relationship drive this story? What would have

happened without Robert causing

 "I heard Vi's mum dumped [your dad] because she wants to

· How does Vi's parents'

trouble?

get back with Vi's real father..." What impact do the bullies have on Russell and Vi?

About this book

Vi's mum Easter is clearly a spy. She denies it, but when Vi's long-lost dad (aka the uber-spy Sir Charge) wrecks Easter's wedding to George, the truth is out. Will anyone stop arguing long enough to let Vi apply for Spy School? Maybe it's time for an unlikely alliance with her robot-obsessed nearlystepbrother instead.

Parental separation and blended families aren't the main focus of this

fast-paced adventure, but add weight and depth to a light-hearted, action-driven storyline.

Thinking and talking

 "You're always here, always under my feet - everywhere I turn... just leave me alone!" Does Vi feel this way about Russell by the end of the book? How do things change?

Try this...

"Robert was never the right man for your mother - she needs ice to her fire.... someone calm, someone dependable. Someone exactly like George Sprout." Is Nan right? Research and write character profiles for Easter, Robert and George. Use to make a case for or against Nan's judgement. "No, I don't think

he's a villain, I'm saying that he IS a villain... Yes, I know divorce can make it feel that way..." What do Vi's mum and dad argue about? Find examples, then play counsellor to help them resolve their differences.



Carev Fluker-Hunt is a freelance writer, creative learning consultant, and

founder of Cast of Thousands (castofthousands.co.uk)

Filling in THE GAPS

Kathryn Brereton reports on an innovative Year 3 writing project aimed at improving provision, practice and pedagogy

ast year, my colleagues and I – all English advisors - observed that a number of teachers had been reporting concerns that, despite their concerted efforts, some pupils were finding certain aspects of writing tricky. Spelling, basic sentence construction and maintaining the correct purpose and audience across a piece were all proving difficult for them. These teachers also mentioned lingering knowledge and skills gaps from lockdown. My fellow English advisors and I had noticed similar issues when carrying out writing moderation activities.

We wanted to help, but where to start? Drawing on evidence-informed approaches, we put together a year-long project comprised of professional development sessions coupled with bespoke, in-school visits. The project was fluid, changing to address the issues we found through working collaboratively with the teachers involved. Targeting selected Year 3 pupils, the project aimed to overcome barriers identified within end-of-KS1 assessment setting a secure trajectory for achievement and progress across Year 3. Here are some of the things that worked best.

Forensic assessment

Although teachers receive attainment data for their incoming pupils, this needs unpicking forensically to diagnose next steps for teaching and learning. We therefore worked with their teachers to look carefully at target pupils' actual writing. The STA's non-statutory teacher assessment frameworks and writing exemplifications for the end of Key Stage 1 (tinyurl.com/tp-KS1Assess) and Devon County Council's Year 3 Evidence Gathering

Grid (tinyurl.com/tp-EGGs) proved helpful when assessing children's level of attainment in detail.

Harnessing pupil voice

Pupil voice can become a luxury in a packed curriculum. So, at the start and end of the project we worked through a questionnaire, one-to-one, with each target pupil. The results were both enlightening and useful. For example, hearing of the value pupils placed on transcription when asked What makes you a good writer? and about diverse home literacies via the question Do you ever write at home? enabled practice and provision to be reviewed

accordingly. It



pleasing shift in confidence and in attitudes to writing across the year.

Targeted input

A clearer understanding of the target pupils' needs meant that bespoke provision could be planned. In some cases, this was a time-bound intervention in addition to English, such as additional spelling or handwriting teaching. In Closing the Writing Gap (David Fulton, 2022) Alex Quigley writes beautifully of boosting his son's handwriting stamina through short 'sprints' paired with the teaching of self-monitoring strategies. Several schools successfully trialled similar approaches. One headteacher decided to run additional 'Grammar Gang' sessions herself. Easier to resource, but also impactful in schools short of additional adults. was the increased use of flexible guided groupings



Experiential learning

James Clements in On the Write Track (Routledge, 2023) tells us, 'There are few things in education more valuable for children's learning than ensuring they have first-hand experiences.' The Writing for Pleasure Centre, which promotes research-informed writing teaching, says that children write, 'because they are moved to' (tinyurl.com/ tp-Moved2Write). With this in mind, we reviewed medium- and long-term planning with some schools. For example, making pizzas resulted in high-quality instruction writing, showing a consistent awareness of purpose and audience.

CPD for **EAL**

We discovered that some teachers lacked confidence or recent training in how to support learners using English as an additional language. The Bell Foundation offers a range of useful, practical resources such as their substitution tables (a table giving model sentences with a range of choices from which learners may select) to scaffold talk and writing (tinyurl.com/tp-SubstitutionTables).

Opportunities for oracy

James Britton famously wrote that 'Reading and writing float on a sea of talk.' When reviewing writing teaching sequences with teachers, we sometimes found that oral rehearsal had been squeezed out. Building in using the substitution tables mentioned above, sentence stems or opportunities for partner talk or for using recordable devices, proved supportive measures.

Make links with reading

Speaking, listening, reading and writing are of course

inextricably linked. We repeatedly heard of pupils struggling to secure the basic concept of a sentence - in particular, not yet understanding where sentences should end/begin. Although the approaches recommended here can help with this, we also found that supporting pupils to develop reading fluency – learning to attend to punctuation for meaning - impacted their ability then to understand how punctuation 'worked' within writing.

The 'drip, drip' approach

Alex Quigley says that novice writers need 'support, scaffolds and nudges'. Revisiting identified spelling patterns and common exception words and imitating sentence structures via quick lesson starters or early morning work provided this. Pie Corbett's Jumpstart! Grammar (Routledge, 2015) is an essential part of your teacher toolkit for ideas. Sometimes though, just reminding pupils of the prompts available on classroom working walls was the simple nudge needed.

As we all met throughout this project, it was exciting to learn of the progress teachers and their pupils were making. We were impressed, as always, by the careful reflection practitioners made and their efforts to provide equity for their pupils.

There were many key takeaways from the project. The biggest lesson, however, was never to make assumptions, as the perceived rather than the actual barriers that emerged were sometimes very different. "Check your capital letters and full stops," said one teacher – a continued refrain in countless classrooms. But what if (as it transpired was the case for one pupil), you don't know what capital letters are? What else might be slipping through the net?

YOUR ROUTE TO WRITING SUCCESS



Consider the assessment of writing in your class/school.

How robust and consistent is it? Has it enabled you to diagnose sharp next steps for teaching and learning? What resources are available to support the process?



Utilise add-in rather than add-on experiential learning. As you plan a unit

of writing, think how hands-on experiences might enhance the teaching and learning.



If you lack a teaching assistant, where might targeted work fit within your quality

first teaching? Start simply and manageably.



Not all writing must be written down! Consider how talk, audio and

video recording or teacher scribing can capture ideas and vocabulary and support sentence construction.



Where are the gaps in your own professional development? What

is now on your CPD wish list?



Make time for pupil voice. Listen to the barriers pupils tell you about

so you can offer support — but also to the positives on which you can capitalise.



Kathryn Brereton has taught pupils across the primary age range

and is now an English Adviser for Cambridgeshire County Council.



WAGOLL

Zo and the Forest of Secrets by Alake Pilgrim

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how to write a breathless chase scene

The achevine of the pook with your class.

Linyurl.com/tp-ZoWAGOLL

o and the Forest of Secrets is an exciting fantasy adventure set in the lush natural landscape of the Caribbean island of Trinidad. It's ideal for readers aged nine and up who are fans of Katherine Rundell's The Explorer or the Percy Jackson series. The story features two children with different secrets who work together to battle strange creatures and dangerous adults who are after them and their gifts. The heroine, Zo Joseph is stuck at a remote seaside village. She's been forced to move there from the city with her mother's new family, after her parents' divorce.



Zo and the Invisible Island, the sequel to Zo and the Forest of Secrets is out now.

She's missing her father more than ever as he's out of the country for work. But Zo has a plan: she'll pretend to be lost in the forest so that her dad comes to find her.

Her strategy soon backfires though, and she finds herself in the forest being chased by robotic gnats, smart-mouthed Anansi spiders and a dinosaur-like creature she calls the Flesh-skinner.

Now, Zo has to figure out how to survive and get back to her family. On the way, she rescues a boy, Adri Khan, who is in Trinidad from New York to celebrate his mother's cancer remission. Adri has no memory of the weeks he and his parents have been missing from the village since their boat capsized at sea.

When Zo discovers she has the ability to fall into Adri's memories through touch, she hides it, not sure what his mind can handle.

But is Adri actually the one keeping secrets? After all, he has a broken key card for the abandoned research centre somewhere in the hills. The centre – a place locals called 'the Zoo' – was run by a secretive council who carried out experiments on animals... and maybe even humans. Adri thinks his parents are still in the centre and wants to find them. Zo just wants to get out.

As Zo and Adri fight to escape the Flesh-skinner, the insect-like X, and Yara, a powerful shapeshifter with secrets of her own, they must decide if they can trust each other and work together, to find their way back home.

FIVE TIPS FOR WRITING A FIRST-PERSON CHASE SCENE

PUT YOURSELF IN YOUR CHARACTER'S BODY

What physical reactions are they having to being chased? How do these reactions change as the chase continues?

USE THE FIVE SENSES

What is your character seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching (or being touched by) on the chase?

CREATE STAGES

Think of the chase as having different stages. Have something change and become more intense in each stage: whether in the setting, events and actions, or your character's feelings and reactions.

ADD OBSTACLES AND SURPRISES

In addition to what's chasing them, what other challenges, blocks, surprises, or twists

does your character face as they're trying to get away?

PLAY WITH HOPE

Allow your character to have moments in the chase where things seem hopeful and they have near misses and near escapes, followed by events becoming more intense or taking a surprising turn. This will increase our sense of tension as readers.

Extract from

Chapter 4 – Run, pages 42-43

Here I used sound (what Zo is hearing) to create a sense of anticipation and fear.

Create a worthy opponent: someone or something smart enough, scary enough, or with interesting talents and abilities, to make the chase exciting. In this case, giving the beast a personified element ('a scream that seemed almost human') adds to the dread that Zo feels.

In addition to what's behind her, there are obstacles in Zo's way that she has to get around to escape what's chasing her. This makes the chase more exciting.

Zo keeps thinking of ways to escape, and this gives her and the reader hope that she might do so. We all need hope to keep going. Zo and the Forest of Secrets

I turned and sprinted in the opposite direction, past the hill, into the forest. Behind me, I could hear the scrabble of sliding dirt and stones, the crack and crash of trees. Hopefully, the undergrowth would slow it down. I held the torch in front of me, jumping over roots, and ducking under branches. I didn't dare look back. I could hear it somewhere behind me: a repeating snarl that started low then got louder and higher, until it was a scream that seemed almost human. I pushed myself to run faster, ignoring the knot in my side.

My backpack hooked on some bushes as I scrambled through them. It dragged me backwards. I tried to pull free. I could hear the Flesh-skinner getting closer. I could smell it: a thick swampy rotten-egg smell. I yanked myself forward, but the backpack wouldn't budge. It was me or this bag. I had to leave it behind. I squeezed out of it and kept running.

Sweat blinded me. My legs whipped past each other. I stumbled but kept going. Any second, that thing might reach out and grab me. The thought alone gave me wings. I dashed between the trees. Did I have time to swing myself up into their branches? What if it could climb? There was no time to stop and find out. I kept running. Trees rushed past me. The ground started rising, slowly at first, then more steeply. I gasped for air. I felt the beast fall back slightly, but it was still close. I forced myself to go even faster.

I chose these more specific and dramatic verbs — 'jumping', 'ducking' — to create more intensity in Zo's movements, rather than using 'running' every time, to describe what she's doing.

Zo is already having uncomfortable physical reactions to the chase (a 'knot in [her] side') that make us nervous about whether she'll make it. Your characters weaknesses and vulnerabilities are important for helping us connect to and root for them.

Even though she doesn't fully see what's chasing her, she can smell it. By dropping details from the five senses throughout the chase, I create a sense of dread in Zo and the reader about what's after her.

Zo's physical reactions are more intense now at this stage of the chase (she can barely breathe). There is tension between hope (the beast has fallen back slightly) and danger ('but it was still close'). This sets us up for the major twist that comes next! An exciting chase has the element of surprise.

For more, check out Zo and the Forest of Secrets.

42-43



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coming from, why they are struggling, and how the



Puppet

David Almond's heartwarming story, charmingly illustrated by Lizzy Stewart, provides lots of opportunities to think about life's big questions

KAREN HART

hat should a puppet master do when he's old and alone, and all his puppets are gone?

This is the beautiful story of an old puppet master, named Sylvester, who decides to make one last toy.

Cobbled together from bits and pieces he finds lying about his workbench, the marionette he creates is a strange little thing, like nothing he's made before – and when Sylvester speaks to him, Puppet speaks back!

This is a book that spans many themes, such as loneliness, daring to take risks, caring, compassion and the importance of creativity, and is ideal for sharing with both KS2 and older KS1pupils.

Here, the illustrations form as much a part of the story as the text, and help in bringing the tale to life. They are a useful tool when looking at the art of storytelling, and comparing different types of texts such as comics and newspapers.

This book would also make a fantastic accompaniment for a puppet-making topic or a planned trip to a puppet theatre, and is great for inspiring drama/music and movement sessions, as well as making

a good basis for poetry or creative writing activities.

I have included ideas for simplifying activities where required, to work for younger age groups.

Getting to know the book

Read the book with your class, and then discuss the following points:

- In chapter one, Sylvester hears Puppet speak for the first time. How do you think Sylvester would have felt?
 Surprised? Amazed? A little bit scared?
- Do you think it was a wise idea to take Puppet to the park? Why/why not?
- · Why do you think Sylvester and Fleur





became such good friends?

- Did you enjoy the story? Did you like the way it ended?
- Have any members of the class ever seen a puppet show – what was the story being told?

Creating your own characters

Give everyone a sheet of A4 paper and provide each table with plenty of scrap papers of different colours, patterns and textures – newspapers, magazines, craft paper scraps etc., and any scrapbox materials available.

Tell the children they're each going to design a puppet. Give instructions that they should first draw a head, then a separate body, upper and lower arms, upper and lower legs, hands and feet.

Next, pupils should cut out each body part and place them on their sheet of paper to look like a puppet, leaving a little gap between each section before glueing them in place. The children should join the puppet sections together with a connecting line drawn with felt tipped pen, to look like a puppet's joints. (Children can look at the pictures in the book for reference.) Remind pupils to be careful not to draw their puppet's body parts too large, but if some sections overlap the paper a bit that's okay. The children can use any of the scrap papers and materials to decorate their puppet, remembering that Sylvester's puppet was wonky, with a finger missing and mis-matched legs, so they don't need to aim for perfection. Pupils can finish their craft project by giving their puppet a name.

It's a good idea to have a pre-made puppet picture before starting this activity, so that the children can use it as a reference.

Simplify this activity for younger children, by asking them to make just a puppet face using a paper plate and craft materials, giving their puppet a name in the same way.

Constructing a puppet story

Working as a class, ask for volunteers to share their puppet creations, telling the class their puppet's name and a bit about them. Is it a friendly puppet, does it have super-powers, is it shy or maybe a bit of a show-off? It's a nice idea for teacher to start this activity by sharing their own puppet with the class and telling everyone about its personality. Go on to write some of the information shared by the class on the board – puppets' names, appearance, anything special they can do, personalities, etc.

Next, ask children to write a description of their puppet on a separate sheet of paper – eventually this will be used to accompany their puppet picture as a wall display.

Ask children to write in the first person, explaining the description should read as if the puppet is talking about itself.



Again, have an example ready relating to your own puppet. A starter for children could be:

Hello! My name is and I am a puppet. I am a (boy/girl/fairy/super-hero) and I am very good at I have (big eyes/a button nose/curly hair) and live with (child's name). One day I would like to

Follow-up lesson

Children will now have acquired quite a lot of information they can use to help them build a puppet story. Refer the class back to the book, thinking about the way the puppet was described when Sylvester put him together:

'He used thin wire and tweezers to put together a leg and then another leg. One was longer than the other; one had a very wobbly knee joint. One was dark wood; one was light. He added feet: one with a black boot, one with a brown. He found a pair of arms, one of them with powerful-looking muscles. One hand had the full four fingers, the other only three.'

Discuss how the children's story could begin, e.g. 'Puppet woke up one morning feeling...'

Take it further =>=>=

CREATE A PICTURE STORY

Throughout the book there are lovely comic-style picture sequences that tell their own little story. Point out the way the illustrator draws little 'action lines' to show movement in the artwork.

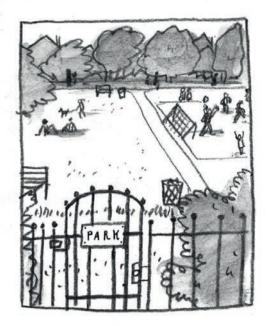
As a class, talk about simple stories, or sequences from a story, that could be

shown this way. Some ideas could be:

- A leaf falls from a tree, flutters down, then lands on someone's head.
- A flying bird drops a worm, which lands on someone's fancy hat.
- A wizard touches a pumpkin with a wand, there's a big bang, then the pumpkin turns into a box of treasure.

 A cat is asleep, a mouse comes out of his hole and eats the cat's food, then runs back to his hole.

Next, ask children to decide on a simple story they could tell in this way and think about how many boxes they will need to tell it in — no more than five. Children should also think about the size of each box, using the book as a reference — some smaller and



Next, talk about an adventure a puppet could be involved in. Provide a simple framework to get children started if needed, such as:

Puppet left the house for his morning walk, feeling cheerful. Puppet was so busy watching a butterfly fluttering in the sky, he didn't see the big, deep puddle and fell in right up to his waist! He...

Puppet was so happy to be safe and dry again, he danced all the way home and...

With everyone collaborating, create a whole-class story. Write the story up on the board for everyone to copy into their workbooks. Try to get some form of contribution from everyone in the class, even if it's just the colour of Puppet's clothes. Encourage children to change the story as they write it up to include their own ideas, and to be as imaginative as they can. Alternatively, older and more able children can write their own story without the use of a framework; children who need a bit more help perhaps changing just one or two words.

Looking at alliteration

I've found this activity to be really good as a vocabulary builder — it's also a handy one to use when you have a spare ten minutes to fill. It works better than a general 'looking for describing words' exercise, in that it encourages children to think about words, mulling them over to find the ones with the right sound. If children can have their own alliteration/vocabulary notebooks, this is really useful, as they will then have a good source of vocabulary to dip into when working on descriptive writing, poetry, etc.

Start by talking about alliteration and what it means. A simple definition could be:

Alliteration means words starting with the same sound next to each other, for example.

- Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.
- Sidney, the sneaky, slippery, slimy snake.
- Fiona, the fancy, fluttery, floaty fairy.

We use alliteration to draw attention to something we want to show our readers, or to create rhythm – especially in poetry – and to create a nice sound with words.

Next, ask children to think of some examples of alliteration that could be used with the word 'puppet'. Some examples could be: purple, painted, pretty, perfect, polished, peachy, polite, puzzled. Make a note of these on the board, with children writing the words in their workbooks.

Making an acrostic

Using their alliterative words as a jumping off point, ask children to create an acrostic poem using the title word 'puppet'— explaining what the term acrostic means: a poem or other piece of writing in which the first

Loved this? Try these...

- Here We Are by Oliver Jeffers (KS1)
- ❖ A Way to the Stars by David Almond (KS1)
- ❖ Skellig by David Almond (KS2)
- ❖ The Final Year by Matt Goodfellow (KS2)
- ♦ The Wrong Shoes by Tom Percival (KS2)
- The Boy at the Back of the Class by Onjali Rauf (KS2)

letter of each new line spells out a word. Give children an example of an acrostic poem, such as this one using the word ghost:

Grey and transparent,
Harmless but spooky,
Owls his only friends.
Silently floating through forests
and woodlands,
Through the river's bend.

Explain that their poem doesn't need to rhyme, and they already have a good bank of 'P' words they can use. It might be a good idea to write some words beginning with the letters 'U' 'E' and 'T' on the board for children to use if they get stuck, especially for younger age groups. Children can draw a design to accompany their acrostic poem if time allows.



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@Karen.Journalist

some larger boxes depending on what is being shown in each one. For example, a leaf falling might need three small boxes, followed by a larger box showing it landing on someone's head. Remind children they can use movement lines and words such as 'BANG!' if they want to.

Give children A4 paper to work on; for younger children, you can provide a framework with four boxes pre-drawn.

GET INTO NATURE

For a fun activity that's great for encouraging imagination and creativity, why not take your class out to a nearby park, field or woodland — anywhere you can find some natural resources. Ask children to collect interesting plant materials — seed pods, grasses, sections of bark, acorns, pinecones and twigs.

Ask pupils to create their own puppet

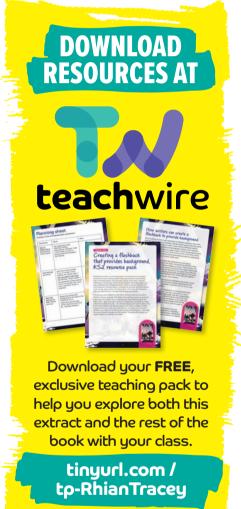
collage using a suitable flat surface in the environment you are in — a pathway, a flat grassy area etc., with children continuing to search for good materials to use as their artwork takes shape.

As artwork can't be saved, take photos of finished collages to print out later, making these into a class book of puppet art, or for use as part of a book topic display.

WAGOLL

Hide and Seek: a Bletchley Park mystery by Rhian Tracey

Peer inside the mind of the author, and help pupils understand how writers can create a flashback to provide background



ased on historical events, *Hide and Seek* is about Ned Letton and his mother, Helen, who are swept up in the government's efforts to save the nation's art collection from destruction during the second World War. They are sent from Bletchley Park, after signing the Official Secrets Act, to Manod in North Wales, where they are led into a secret quarry. Inside this 'Aladdin's Cave' are thousands of priceless masterpieces — and an army of workers from galleries and museums across the country, striving to conserve and protect the collection.



Hide and Seek: a Bletchley Park mystery (£7.99, Bonnier Books Ltd) is out now.

Ned and his mother lodge with Mrs Thomas (the local teacher), her son Harri and Anni, a Jewish refugee. Anni's father has been interred as an enemy alien and her mother is away on war work. Mrs Thomas, who relies on Kip, her guide dog, looks after Anni as if she were family, but some in the village aren't as welcoming to refugees. Ned's mother is tasked with running the Picture of the Month scheme, (which still carries on to this day!), taking one piece of art from Wales back to London once a month.

When something happens to Ned's mum, he is left to carry out her vital war work, because if he doesn't, she'll lose her job and they'll be sent back to Bletchley – something that neither of them can face.

With his old friends from Bletchley Park, as well as new ones from Wales, by his side, and of course, Kip, the fantastic guide dog, Ned embarks on a dangerous and desperate journey to London, carrying with him the most precious and priceless cargo.

Hide and Seek is the second book in the *Bletchley Park Mystery* series.

FIVE TOP TIPS ON WRITING A FLASHBACK

LOOK AROUND

Link the present moment to the past with visual objects that the reader can spot, such as a telescope.

WHY ARE YOU WRITING THE SCENE?

What do you want the reader to learn from this extract? Flashbacks must serve a purpose, shining a light on a moment from a character's past.

LESS IS MORE

Keep it short. You don't want your reader to get lost between the present and the past, or worse, to get confused.

FEEL THE STORY

Sensory language allows your reader to connect in a four-dimensional way with the character's past. Think about going to a 3D or 4D screening at the cinema; your writing should feel the same.

Activate the flashback by bringing your character's sensory world to life.

SOUND IT OUT

Listen to your writing using one of the free text-to-speech software packages that are available. You'll be able to hear the flashback and listen to how it fits with the section of writing that comes before and after it. Pretend it's an audiobook you are listening to!

Extract from

Chapter 2, pages 10-11

I've used the telescope detail to link Ned on the mountain with Ned in the flashback on his journey to Wales.

Hide and Seek: a Bletchley Park mystery

A circle of torchlight shone towards them, dazzling

I added this detail to remind readers that the signposts had been them visualise the scene in this flashback.

This continues the link, as well as showing what makes Ned tick.

Readers will be

the Blitz, but I

in on the chaos,

familiar with photos

wanted to make this

personal and zoom

through Ned's eyes.

and reports about

Ned, and making him think of Sirius, the brightest star, also known as the Dog Star. People thought the North Star was the brightest, but this wasn't true. He'd borrowed books on the solar system from the library in town, when his mother had taken him. And his grandfather had given him an old pocket telescope. Ned had shoved the telescope into the pocket of his shorts before his mother rushed him to the station to catch the train.

After many trains, they'd eventually reached Birmingham, where they'd walked through the blitzed streets, navigating by pubs and cinemas and other landmarks. He wondered if he'd ever be able to navigate by the stars, like sailors did. It wasn't until he had to step out of the path of air-raid wardens that he realised he'd been feeling sorry for himself, and quickly pulled himself together.

The wardens were working their way through the rubble of a building to find people, dead or alive. Although he'd seen the pictures in the papers and heard the reports on the radio, Ned wasn't ready to see the ruins of strangers' lives. Yet as they passed one bombed-out house, Ned had found he couldn't take his eyes off it. The front was ripped open, and a bedroom exposed, like a doll's house from a horror story. Splinters of plaster and jagged edges of bricks were all that was left of a church. His mother gently suggested he recite the names of the planets aloud, which helped distract him, as it always did. Then they'd caught another train and somehow, finally, arrived in Wales.

As the circle of light got brighter, the gloom of the tunnel gradually receded.

Ned's attitude here echoes the mood of the moment, and how people were encouraged not to dwell on things.

> The image of a doll's house in this flashback gives the reader a sense of the scale of damage, as well the powerlessness people would have felt during the Blitz.

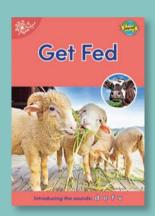
And here's another link to Ned's affinity with astronomy, which helps highlight this theme throughout the flashback.

I wanted to create a circular pattern in this flashback, beginning and ending with light, allowing the flashback to recede. much like the 'gloom of the tunnel'.

Truly decodable books for beginner and older readers

Decodable books for beginner readers to practise their foundational reading skills

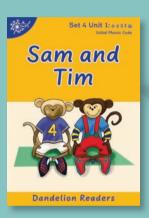
The Dandelion series covers the sounds of the alphabet through to split vowel spellings.



Dandelion World Stages 1-7 (14 book set)



Units 8-10 (12 book set) 9781907170348



Phonic Books Dandelion Readers Set 4 Units 1-10 (14 book set) 9780241687734



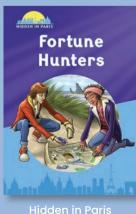


Dandelion Card Games

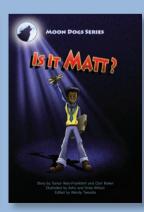
Decodable books with gripping quests and contemporary, age-appropriate stories to engage older students

The Phonic Books catch-up series cover the sounds of the alphabet through to adjacent consonants, consonant diaraphs, suffixes, and the introduction of alternative spellings for yowel sounds.

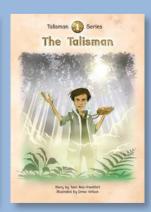




Hidden in Paris (10 book set) 9780241648940



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Resource roundup

Five ideas for exceptional literacy teaching

1

Transform time with Hope teaching clock

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3



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reading pen that's prepped and ready to take your learners to the next level. Being a student with reading and comprehension differences can feel isolating, but this device has proven to increase reading and comprehension by ten months after just eight weeks of use. We know the C-Pen Reader 2 is the right devices to provide support, but if you need some convincing why not see for yourselves, take advantage of our free 30-day trials, sign up now at scanningpens.co.uk/request-trial

Something for EVERYONE

Kelly Ashley explains how to open up knowledge, conversation and reading choices with non-fiction magazines

s readers, we each draw on a unique bank of readerly influence that shapes our choices. From early reading role models, who shared bedtime stories, to the discovery of binge-worthy authors of print-based and on-screen texts, each experience combines to form our distinctive reader interests and identities.

Magazine choice can also reveal this, offering golden opportunities to uncover delights and dislikes. The weekly or monthly nature of these publications provides access to fresh and novel material, supplementing traditional book reading. Creative use of language. accessibility of information and the contemporary relevance of magazine content (often mirroring popular culture) can closely reflect pupils' everyday experiences, opening up valuable opportunities for book talk. The marriage of words, pictures and other features also offers a rich source of visual literacy.

Non-fiction publications such as What on Earth! (a monthly factual magazine for ages seven—14), The Week Junior (a weekly news magazine for ages seven—14), Okido (a monthly science magazine for ages three—seven), Little Kids (a monthly geography magazine for ages three—six) and Nat Geo Kids (a monthly geography magazine for ages seven—12) are delightful devices that can reveal the

joy of non-fiction as vehicles for reading enjoyment.

Investigating choice, interest and access

Choice, interest and magazine access are key areas explored through The Open University and What on Earth! reading engagement research study (Phase 1 pilot spring 2023, Phase 2 autumn 2024). Initial findings indicate that teachers view the incorporating of magazines into the reading repertoire as challenging.

Cost is a key concern, with the compounded challenge that magazines

shift perceptions. One Year 5 teacher reflects, 'Pupils' understanding of reading (was initially) through books in the library or books at home. (Magazines) have been a nice, added layer to how they can read and develop knowledge.'

Another teacher in the study agreed, '(Pupils) read the magazine differently than they read their library books or material for a lesson. They interact differently – more positively, more enthusiastically.'

Early findings show that providing opportunities for pupils to explore magazines during independent reading time can open up new possibilities – knowledge, conversation and choice.

Broadening knowledge

Non-fiction magazines can expand knowledge of new ideas as well as teachers' understanding of pupils as readers. Is there a group of budding farmers in your class who might enjoy harvesting this interest with the help of Farmers Weekly magazine? Or maybe some brick enthusiasts who can block out time to delve into Lego Club Junior magazine?

If sourcing magazine variety poses a challenge, appeal to families and other

"Consider how language, layout and other features communicate new information to the reader"

may become tatty too quickly from frequent use. There also seems to be a lack of access to current or relevant material within school library stock.

Teachers in the study voiced concern that pupils may place too much emphasis on puzzles and games over main article content.

Weekly exposure to these publications has helped to



community champions to donate publications.

Non-fiction offerings in magazine form can encourage readers to make connections between new and existing knowledge.

Magazine layout and design features are fun to explore and can support readers to anticipate what information each issue will reveal.

Model how to skim and scan factoids as you navigate the magazine together. As the purpose, audience and content of each publication will vary, consider how language, layout and other features communicate new information to the reader. Charts, maps, diagrams and photographs often ease the burden of unfamiliar, technical vocabulary and concepts, unlocking new avenues of enjoyment and learning.

Starting conversations

'Book talk' is a key strategy to draw on within a culture of reading where pupils and staff signal habit and agency as part of their enjoyment. Keep 'magazine talk' informal by allowing time and space to share opinions, offer connections and form reading relationships across the school community.

One element of Phase 2 of The Open University and What on Earth! magazine engagement study is weekly, teacher-led 'magazine moments' to foster dialogue and discussion.

Introduce your own 'magazine moments' to relaunch interest. One week, you might invite pupils to share their favourite features and articles. In another, you might discuss how organisational features (e.g. graphics, illustrations, diagrams) have helped you understand new or challenging ideas. Perhaps vou could invite class debate to consider the author's position on a persuasive piece, drawing on critical literacy skills.

A 'magazine canteen' is another fun way to tempt readers. Gather a range of publications for display, with plenty of space for pupils to wander and browse informally. Which magazines catch pupils' eyes? Which would they avoid? Encourage readers to share the reasons behind their selections. This

menu of magazines can top up your teacher knowledge of pupils' reading preferences, whilst also introducing the range of material on offer that can be chosen for independent reading time.

Broadening choice

An interesting finding from Phase 1 of The Open University and What on Earth! engagement study was the impact that weekly magazine exploration had on pupils' wider reading choices. One teacher reflects, 'I've noticed that children are coming back from the library with more non-fiction texts now. Prior to using the magazine... it was predominately fiction but I've noticed a shift... They've found facts about history or geography in the magazine and looked for books in the library that link.

Whilst magazine reading can be a catalyst to expand non-fiction reading repertoires (biographies, travel writing, historical texts, scientific texts, etc.), there is also potential to draw in reluctant readers with magazines initially, to then springboard choice into the fiction realm. For example, running fans may race to the tips offered in Runner's World magazine. A skilled 'Reading Teacher' could then point them to linked fiction recommendations on a running theme such as Quiet Storm (Kimberly Whittam), Armistice Runner (Tom Palmer) or Ghost (Jason Reynolds).

Whether your pupils are tempted by learning new facts, testing their puzzle prowess or giggling at cartoons, the vibrant layouts, vivid content and new opportunities offered through non-fiction magazine exploration can offer children of all ages a fantastic opportunity to widen their reading experience. Visit ourfp.org/ publications to find out more about The Open University and What on Earth! magazine engagement study.

Magazines in the classroom

- Feature magazines prominently in reading areas, to show they are valued. Set up a 'magazine market' where pupils can shop and browse potential new reads.
- Offer a 'magazine swap shop' on the playground before or after school. Invite families to bring in magazines from home and exchange them for a different volume. Share the message that the school values all forms of reading.
- Consider how using a 'magazine moment' might draw pupils in. Talk about things that you, yourself, find interesting as a reader and encourage children to share their own interests, too.
- Ask pupils which sections of a magazine they are most looking forward to reading each month. What is it that draws the eye, and why?
- Foster critical literacy by encouraging discussion about magazine content. Do you agree or disagree with the information shared by the author? Consider sources, and the purpose of content shared to widen understanding.
- Form 'magazine mates' clubs based on different interests. Who are the puzzle masters, fact-finders, curious comics and eco-warriors in your classroom?



Kelly Ashley is a lecturer in Reading for Pleasure for The Open University and the author

of Word Power: Amplifying vocabulary instruction.

Her professional interests are reader identity, reader motivation and language development.

ourfp.org



Resource roundup

Five ideas for exceptional literacy teaching



Broaden children's knowledge of the world with The Week Junior

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DK Super Readers

Enter the wonderful world of non-fiction! Children aged three to 11 will love exploring the exciting world of dinosaurs, animals, natural wonders, and more with DK's non-fiction levelled readers. With five levels increasing in complexity, the beautifully designed DK Super Readers cover engaging curriculum-aligned topics. Discover a wealth of accompanying materials to enhance the learning iourney, all accessed via a QR code on the back cover of each book. With a book for every interest, young readers will learn more about the world around them and build subject vocabulary while progressing reading skills. Visit: learning.dk.com/uk/

dk-super-readers
Email: dklearning@dk.com



Fantastic phonics resources

Reading Planet Rocket Phonics is a DfE-validated SSP programme with a mission: to help every child to keep up, not catch up. Written by author, trainer and consultant Abigail Steel, the programme is available for Reception and Year 1. With Rocket Phonics, you get everything needed for reading and writing: fully decodable books, flashcards, teaching plans, pupil booklets and more. Plus, Rocket Phonics Online includes a range of innovative digital resources to bring phonics to life. Find out more at risingstars-uk.com/

REASONS TO TRY...

5 Scholastic Phonics **Book Bag Readers**

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and early reading skills in the classroom and at home. Decodable fiction and non-fiction readers 100 per cent matched to Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised.

ALIGNED WITH LITTLE WANDLE LETTERS AND SOUNDS **REVISED**

All of Scholastic's Phonic Book Bag Readers titles and supporting materials are 100 per cent aligned with Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised, a complete phonics programme that is validated by the Department for Education. Nearly 5,000 primary schools in the UK have chosen the Little Wandle Phonics programme, helping children to apply their learning to become highly competent readers while also instilling good habits to help them become life-long readers.

MOVES CHILDREN FROM DECODING TO COMPREHENSION

The series aims to reinforce classroom learning, focusing on different phonemes within the current and preceding levels to foster fluency and phrasing skills. Each decodable reader has been carefully crafted to help children to build on their phonic knowledge, moving confidently from decoding the words to comprehension. This all helps children become confident, fluent readers who will enjoy reading, both for school and for pleasure.



The series includes a wide selection of diverse and inclusive texts,



accompanied by bright and contemporary illustrations and photographs that are detailed so as not to provide picture cues and prompting. Within each book, you will find activities to help children practise and apply their early learning skills, including the 'talk about it' and 'retell the story' tasks designed to help them develop their oracy, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Notes and guidance are also provided to help you feel confident in

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INSPIRES A LOVE OF READING

Scholastic are passionate about reading and learning and are committed to providing books and resources that inspire a love of reading in pupils everywhere. With this in mind, our readers have purposely been designed to support both children's phonic knowledge and early reading skills at home and at school so they can go on to become lifelong readers. The series includes diverse and contemporary fiction and non-fiction decodable readers, exposing children to a wide variety of new and exciting texts that will turn them into expert readers and lovers of books.

KEY POINTS

100 per cent matched to Little Wandle Letters and Sounds Revised – a complete systematic synthetic phonics programme validated by the DfE.

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An inspiring collection of inclusive and contemporary stories spanning both fiction and nonfiction. Available in a range of easy buy packs!

Support children's learning with humorous illustrations and photographs, as well as fun tasks about the texts.

DK SUPER Readers

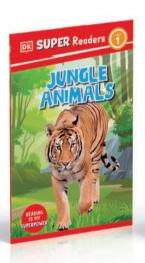


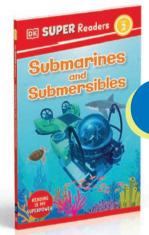
Power up non-fiction reading skills and knowledge, to help children become reading superheroes!

Develop vital non-fiction English reading skills and knowledge by exploring the exciting world of dinosaurs, animals, natural wonders and more!

Discover a wealth of free online materials to enhance the learning journey and support home-reading via the QR code on the back of each book.

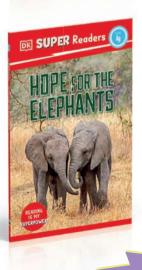
















Discover more!



The next STEP

Emma Spiers takes a detailed look at how to teach Phase 5 phonics



hase 5 phonics is undoubtedly the most challenging element of phonics to teach and learn. Building on Phases 2–4, it tackles the complex part of the English alphabetic code step by step. Children are introduced to the many alternative ways of representing spoken sounds using different spellings. They also learn that some spellings can be pronounced in several different ways.

When to step up

Although it is commonly introduced in Year 1, teaching of Phase 5 should only begin once the learning from Phases 2–4 has been properly established and consolidated. This is because the complex alphabetic code

"The complex alphabetic code builds on the basic sounds and letter combinations introduced in the earlier phases"

builds on the basic sounds and letter combinations introduced in the earlier phases.

The fundamental skills that are the building blocks for Phase 5 phonics include:

- Recognising and identifying all Phase 2, 3 and 4 grapheme-phoneme correspondences.
- Blending to read familiar and unfamiliar Phase 2, 3 and 4 words.
- · Segmenting to spell

familiar and unfamiliar Phase 2, 3 and 4 words.

- Recognising all Phase 2, 3 and 4 tricky/common exception words on sight.
- Reading and writing simple sentences, including Phase 2, 3 and 4 words.

How to teach Phase 5 phonics

How Phase 5 is taught generally depends on the systematic synthetic phonics programme a school follows. Most schools in England follow the prescribed routines and strategies outlined by programmes validated by the Department of Education (tinyurl.com/TP-PhonicsProgrammes). This is a strongly recommended route, but is not mandatory.

Most phonics programmes follow a similar pattern of delivery, based on the most effective ways children learn. This usually follows a four-part teaching sequence introduced in Letters and Sounds (tinyurl. com/tp-LettersSounds):

- · review and revisit
- · teach
- practise
- apply

Revision and prior learning

Phase 5 phonics lessons generally begin by revising prior learning. This always relates to the new learning introduced in the lesson. For example, words containing the common 'igh' trigraph will be revisited in a lesson which introduces the alternative 'ie' spelling for the same spoken sound.

This part of the teaching sequence is designed to bring stored learning into the working memory, ready to be used for reading and writing new words. This provides little impact on learning beyond an initial reminder, so should be delivered as rapidly as possible.

The revise and revisit part of a Phase 5 lesson may include using flashcards or slides, where children recall and join in with a call and response to the visual prompt. It may also involve finding or isolating a particular letter combination from a collection of letters or words.

Teaching new sounds

New Phase 5 sounds are always taught by building on the children's knowledge of



the basic alphabetic code. A thorough understanding of when different spelling rules are applied is essential.

For example:

- igh commonly can be found in the middle of words (bright)
- *ie* is frequently found at the end of one-syllable words (pie)
- i-e (the split digraph) is represented in the middle of words that end with the spoken sounds k,m, d, p, l (bike, time, ride, stripe, while)
- i is usually used on its own when preceded or followed by two consonants (kind, wild)
- y is mostly used at the end of one-syllable words, preceded by two consonants (try)

Providing a child-friendly explanation at the point of teaching is critical to learning the complex alphabetic code, so words used to exemplify the rule should be carefully selected (tinyurl.com/tp-PhonicsExplainers).

The English language is full of exceptions. It's essential to introduce these only once a rule has been established (tinyurl.com/tp-PhonicsRules). The complex code in Phase 5 can be overwhelming, and it's vital to teach each rule step by step.

As part of the teaching process, children should be taught to hear, say and form the new element of the alphabetic code alongside the new spelling rule. This helps with memory retention.

Practising vocabulary

The Phase 5 words that children practise reading and spelling include the newly introduced part of the alphabetic code, plus contrasting alternatives.

For example, in a lesson where children have been learning that 'y' at the end of a one-syllable word, preceded by two consonants, makes the 'igh' sound, words used for reading and spelling might include: sky, try, fly, spy and dry. These may be contrasted with other one-syllable words ending in 'ie' at the end of words only preceded by one consonant. These words could include: die, pie, lie, tie.

This not only maximises the opportunity for children to read and spell many words, including new and prior learning, but also embeds spelling rules in context.

Applying Phase 5 phonics

This part of a phonics teaching sequence is completed at sentence level. It's arguably the most crucial part of the teaching sequence, helping children move beyond single sounds and words to reading and writing full sentences.

For example, if 'y' and 'ie' were the focus of the practice part of the teaching

sequence, a sentence to read or write should apply words that embed the rule taught and practised, e.g. I lie on the grass to look up at the sky.

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This part of the teaching sequence requires significant adult modelling and is not an assessment opportunity. Children need lots of repetition at this stage, so sentences may need to be introduced one word at a time. Reading and rereading sentences several times ensures that overlearning takes place. This improves reading and writing fluency over time. The objective of the 'apply' part of the teaching sequence is to equip children to apply the new learning in broader reading and writing opportunities.

Phonics games

The complex alphabetic code introduced in this phase contains a lot of information for children to remember. Therefore, engagement must be optimised, and memory-building skills practised during daily delivery. Phase 5 phonics games, where children are challenged to recall missing letters in words or missing words in sentences, help build rapid memory recall.

Games, including the misapplication or sorting of alternative spellings are also helpful. These reinforce spelling patterns

Phase 5 phonics at a glance

- Secure the basic alphabetic code, including blending and segmenting, before beginning Phase 5 phonics.
- Know the general rules for how different spelling patterns are applied and how alternative spellings affect sound pronunciation in words.
- Ensure children understand the rules for applying a typical spelling pattern before introducing words that illustrate exceptions.
- Follow a four-part teaching sequence to securely embed new learning, or deploy a validated phonics programme with a good level of consistency.
- Phase 5 phonics games should be interactive and engaging to build memory of the complex alphabetic code. There should also be plenty of opportunities to build on blending and segmenting skills too.

by encouraging children to look more closely and improve reasoning around Phase 5 concepts. Games in which the reading or spelling of words is a 'race against the clock' are ideally placed to build reading and spelling automaticity.

Visit tinyurl.com/ tp-Phase5 to download some free activities.



Emma Spiers is an author, early literacy consultant

and trainer.



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5 Reading Planet

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30 SECOND BRIEFING

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Through our work with the National Literacy Trust or in partnership with independent, accredited universities and evaluators, we ensure that progress as a result of using Reading Planet is part of the story. Measuring success by improvement in children's test scores, we have collated evidence that Reading Planet helps children build their vocabulary, improve their engagement and develop pleasure in reading. Our work with literacy experts has led to Reading Planet's recognition with awards and nominations, including BETT and the Teach Primary awards.



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It has always been key that our stories reflect the real-world lived experiences of children, with families and situations the children can recognise themselves in. With characters and settings that represent all backgrounds, relevance and relatability are built into the Reading Planet programme. Children respond to the modern feel of the stories, and higher-level readers can move on to folk tales and reimaginings from under-represented traditions and communities, along with inspirational figures from non-fiction, expanding their horizons

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beyond the world they know.

Reading Planet publishes fiction and non-fiction books of different genres and styles using different storytelling techniques and visual approaches that will zoom off the page, including poetry books and playscripts. To enable us to do this, we work with a growing team of upcoming and established children's authors across



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interested in reading which is the

best thing you could ask from a

children more excited and

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Deputy Headteacher

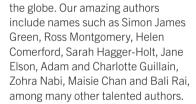


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KEY POINTS

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AVA GOES GREEN

Turn children's climate fear into climate fun with book 1 from the 'MASC to the eco-beat' series. This lower key stage 2 performing and creative arts resource, by Rona D. Linklater, highlights the effects of environmental pollution. Designed to galvanise children into action, the novel music and stories will encourage them to help protect our ecosystem and make a difference. It will also teach all children how to make music together and develop their creative writing and communication skills.

Why choose this resource?

- ✓ A unique fusion of fiction and nonfiction, delivered through an integration of novel music, art, stories and creative tasks, will captivate and allow children to relate to the characters or creatures, such as Kitti kittiwake and Toyesh, the little turtle, explaining about the dangers they face from climate change due to human pollution.
- ✓ QR codes in the book allow access, via my website, to free music accompaniment WAV files for the novel songs, and free instrumental parts for classroom percussion. Ideal for music- non-music specialists, peripatetic sessions or out-of-hours clubs. (Scan QRclip)



✓ Stunning illustrations by Stu McLellan, through agent Beehive Illustration, create a magical world to stimulate children's imagination. Differentiated creative activities provide a fun reinforcement of the learning through interaction and inclusive

- participation for children of all abilities. This approach aims to encourage experiential learning, and develop communication, confidence and wellbeing.
- ✓ Teaching information—Throughout this book, children are encouraged to take responsibility for developing their own ideas and those of their peers. (Five+ books recommended for class use.) While there are opportunities, through basic and extension activities, for the teacher to adjust the 'Let's Create' tasks to suit the individual needs of their children, the focus of these tasks has been linked to the primary grading system assessment statements. See the Teacher Parent Leader Guides from my website for suggested objectives and outcomes.
- √ "There is no more powerful message in the 21st century than climate change. There is no more powerful vehicle for communicating and delivering such a message to children than the performing and creative arts." So...

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The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

Step through the door, push past the coats and rediscover the magic of Narnia with C.S. Lewis' classic fantasy

CERIDWEN ECCLES

here are some books that are timeless classics. Books that hold their own over the years, and appeal to new generations of children with equal levels of awe, wonder and engagement as they did to the youngsters who first read them years previously. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis is one such book. Published 74 years ago, in October 1950, the book is as well-loved today as it was all those years ago. The story follows the lives of four siblings

(Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy Pevensie) as they are evacuated from London in 1940 to escape the Blitz, and sent to live with Professor Digory Kirke at a large house in the English countryside. While exploring the house, Lucy enters a wardrobe and discovers the magical world of Narnia. A battle of good and evil, with a raft of unforgettable characters, serves to make Narnia a place firmly cemented in the hearts of those who have read the book.

This is an excellent novel to read with a lower KS2 class. It's perfect for showcasing the fantasy genre and immersing children in a magical world full of friendship, good prevailing over evil, and the allowance of redemption in the form of Edmund. As the children I teach may have a mixed understanding of what evacuation is, and some of the vocabulary such as *Blitz*, *air raid*, *wireless*, etc, I like to pre-teach the vocabulary and some of the historical background to the story.

Using the movie adaptation is a useful



Book topic

way of helping the children set the scene, as the opening of the film fills in those gaps and allows the children to understand the context of the setting and time. Comparing the opening of the movie and the opening of the book allows for great class discussion - why do the children think the film includes new elements? I like to use the film alongside the book as a comparative tool, and I always feel it serves to boost engagement and the excitement pupils feel. The children love to engage in discussions exploring how certain scenes are created in the movie, and how the film mirrors so much of the actual dialogue from the text exactly. It really focuses them on the words they are reading if they know they will be looking out for them in the film.

Talking about the book

I've found that because The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe is an older book - and indeed the movie was made back in 2005, 19 years ago - it isn't always a text the children are familiar with. This is great from a teaching point of view; the element of surprise and shock is something I relish seeing in the children's faces when key moments happen.

Nothing is more dramatic than the sudden change from war-torn Britain in the summer, to the setting of the wintery world of Narnia when Lucy steps through that wardrobe.

When reading the first chapter, I like to pause the story when Lucy goes through the wardrobe, and get the children to use clues in the text to make predictions about what is happening and where she may end up. It's a great way to build skills of inference, and to demonstrate how you can employ direct quotes to back up ideas.

The first chapter also provides a

really great way of getting the children to put themselves in the shoes of Lucy and to think about how they would be feeling and what questions they might have at this point in the story. This rich discussion serves to draw the children in and enhance their engagement.

Character profiling

Due to his redemption arc, Edmund is a great character to follow through the book. Profiling Edmund's character promotes deep discussions around how the children feel about him at various points in the text. At the start he is cruel and spiteful, and takes delight in making Lucy feel silly. He loves

> humiliating her, and we are given further glimpses into his life when Peter discusses his cruelty to others

at school. I like to get my class to be 'phrase collectors' and record quotes that make them feel certain things about Edmund. too, to refer back to later.

As the story progresses, get the children to refer back to their earlier views on Edmund - how have these changed? When Edmund is captured by the White Witch, made to walk tied up behind the sleigh and whipped, I like to ask the children how they feel now. Do they feel sorry for Edmund? Does he deserve his treatment? The debates that follow are fascinating, and the children always surprise me with the careful consideration they give to their answers. By the end of the story, Edmund has completely changed; it is a really important message to remind the children that even if we make

bad choices, we're not inherently bad. Redemption and forgiveness are possible if we show remorse and make the right choices.

Creative writing opportunities

Children's writing is always so much better when they can see a purpose and reason for writing. The chapter where the reader meets the Beavers makes for a brilliant opportunity to

It's useful to keep a class bank of ideas



TURKISH DELIGHT TASTE TESTING One of my favourite activities to do

alongside reading and exploring the text in our writing and reading lessons, is a Turkish delight taste testing session. Most children I teach have never tried it or, if they have, it will have been the chocolate-coated supermarket version, not the real deal. I like to source a range of flavours from mint to honey and set up the



pull on modern, relatable content in a fun way whilst not detracting from the explicit teaching of knowledge and skills you wish the children to develop. In Year 4, expanded noun phrases and fronted adverbials are an objective they need to secure as part of the expected standard for writing, and these can be easily revised through the exploration of this chapter.

In a reading lesson, I like to dive deeper back into the chapter where the home is described (after previously reading for pleasure and story time). We create a class

bank of descriptions using direct information from what the children have read. I then get pupils to use this to create a Booking.com-style advert to persuade people to come and stay in the Beavers' house. I share the website with the children so they can see how the adverts are typically formulated, and then use a template I have made to support the creation of their own adverts using information from the text. The children are always excited and animated, and I love seeing what they come up with.

Reader's theatre

Reader's theatre (tinyurl.com/ tp-ReadersTheatre) is a strategy that I have only started using in the last few years, and it provides an excellent way for children to merge the love of playing and performing with building the skill of oral reading. The interactions between the four siblings in the book (and other characters they meet along the way) provide great opportunities for the children to practise these elements and develop a love of reading through collaboration and teamwork with peers. They are not expected to memorise the lines they read, or to use props, but reader's theatre allows children to see the power their voice and storytelling have to bring alive a scene through how they speak and read the text.

Through practising a set scene with peers, pupils perfect the speed, fluency and expression of the text. Performances of scenes to the class build confidence and resilience, and help create a positive class community. Scenes that are particularly powerful to do are: when Lucy and Edmund return from Narnia and he denies he went: the exchange between Susan. Lucy and Aslan on his walk to the stone table; the first interaction between the White Witch and Edmund.

Loved this? Try these...

- The Weirdstone of Brisingamen by Alan Garner
- The Legend of Podkin One-Ear by Kieran Larwood
- The Whitby Witches by Robin Jarvis The Land of Roar by Jenny McLachlan
- The Book of Three by Lloyd Alexander
- (part of the Chronicles of Prydain)
- Amari and the Night Brothers by B. B. Alston

Rewriting a chapter from the viewpoint of a character

As I mentioned at the start, one of the most powerful ways to make a child fully invest in a story is to make them really try and put themselves in the shoes of characters in the narrative. At the start, ask them to think about how they would be feeling if they were Lucy. What questions would they have? This is a useful strategy that can be used throughout the book either through discussion or more formal recorded written activities, such as writing a diary to show how Lucy might feel after her wonderful adventure in Narnia to come home to Edmund denying he had been there too. Or creating a feelings mood board, using quotes from the text to show how they would feel if they were Aslan after he came back from the dead. TP



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@Teacherglitter

classroom like a little café. Pupils have a voting sheet to fill out as they try thinking about taste, texture, smell and description. I pose them the question "Would you betray your family for Turkish delight?" This can also lead to discussion opportunities around sugar rations at the time the book was set, as sweets were very rare and so more desirable.

WARDROBE DIORAMAS

Creating wardrobes that open into Narnia is so magical, and it never fails to create joy and excitement in the children. Through their art, they can create the world they visualise when reading the story together, and I love just letting them let their imaginations take over. We make the dioramas early on after reading the first few chapters, so again, the activity serves to ignite their interest and investment in the text.

MANNEQUIN MAGIC AND WORLD BOOK DAY

For the last few years, World Book Day has fallen around the time we've been reading The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. As a staff year group, we have dressed up as characters from the story. There's nothing more exciting for the children than seeing how their teachers love and value the book and recreate the characters. I make my class giggle all day long by being in character as the White Witch, threatening to turn them to stone. This year I also got the children to design a dress with snowflakes for a mannequin, and transform our classroom door into the wardrobe. All of these things added to the magic, creating lasting memories of the joy the book brings.

Skater and THE MIRROR

Pie Corbett models how to write a terrifying tale of dragons

e ducked as something massive swooped above the ruined city. It was the last thing that Skater had expected to see.

"Was that what I think it was?" he muttered, staring up.

A snub-snouted storm dragon swirled overhead. Its leathery wings cast dark shadows over the city as it dipped and dived. Two fiery eyes picked out its victims as it snorted and breathed a blistering firestorm, scorching the ground below. Copper scales caught the dying sunlight, glittering as the storm dragon flexed its talons together ready to seize and squeeze. Deadly spikes jutted out from its curved spine, into a staircase of poisonous thorns. Skater shuddered.

Perhaps it had been foolish of him but half an hour before, Skater had taken his chance, stepped through the glass mirror and passed into this new world. Valjean-Krakanova had made the simple error of leaving him alone in the crystal chamber and Skater would have been mad to loiter... but it looked as if he had stepped out of the frying pan into a furnace.

The dragon sat at the edge of the city tearing the limbs from an unfortunate victim. Mesmerised, Skater watched. "In here," hissed a voice, and a hand beckoned from the doorway of an abandoned building. Inside, it was dark and he could just make out who had spoken. She was dressed like a warrior, armed with a bow, a quiver of arrows and grim determination.

The dragon had come to the city two moons ago and in that time had pillaged the area and destroyed many buildings. Most of the citizens of Fortunata had fled into the forest. Safia explained that only a few of them had remained to fight the dragon. Its lair was a few miles away; a vast cavern on the edge of the mountain that overlooked the city and forest.

Luckily, Skater
had always been a
reader. In ValjeanKrakanova's library
there had been an
ancient book titled
A Guide to Dragons of this
and other Worlds. During his
incarceration, he had spent many
hours reading about different types
of dragon, their husbandry and, most
particularly, a section on 'Dragon
Hunting'. "We can defeat him whilst
he sleeps in his cave, which he will do,
once he has eaten."

When they peered out from the shadows of the doorway, the dragon was no longer to be seen by the forest's edge. It was flying back towards the mountain. Skater beckoned and the pair of them began to pick their way through the ruined city. It was a steep ascent, but they were in no real danger as they could hear and feel through their feet the mighty rumble of the dragon's snores.

Entering a dragon's lair is not without its risks. Safi and Skater picked their way carefully into the cavern. They kept to the shadows, guided forwards by the sound of the sleeping beast. The cave was littered with bleached bones and stank of rotting flesh. Turning a corner, the light from the entrance diminished and only the red glow emanating from the dragon's stomach made it possible to see. Up ahead, a huge pile of gemstones, plates of silver, golden orbs and chains glittered. Snoozing on top was the dragon. Its charred nostrils flared, letting out whisps of smoke and



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AVA GETS ACTIVE

Book 2 of the MASC to the eco-beat series (Music, Art, Stories, Create).

An imaginative and informative sequel to 'Ava Goes Green' by Dr Rona D. Linklater to help turn KS2 children's climate fear into climate fun!

Why choose this resource?

- ✓ Engage children in environmental issues through
 ✓ Stunning illustrations by Stu McLellan, singing and performing together.
- ✓ Confidently deliver reading, writing and creative thinking through music.
- A unique fusion of fiction and nonfiction. Ava, Jamal and their friends now explore how the effects of chemical and gas pollution are affecting climate change and the habitats of creatures such as Max, the tabby cat, Ran-Tan, the orangutan and Pol, the polar bear.
- / QR codes give access to free music accompaniment WAV files for the novel songs, and free instrumental parts for classroom percussion. Ideal for musicnon-music specialists, peripatetic sessions, out-of-hours clubs or home schooling.

- through agent Beehive Illustration, create a magical world to stimulate children's imagination.
- Differentiated creative activities provide a fun reinforcement of the learning through interaction and inclusive participation for children of all abilities.
- Teaching information from the Teacher/ Parent/Leader Guide is available from my website linked to the primary grading system assessment statements.
- The attitudes and actions of our children towards the world they are inheriting are crucial if we are to make a difference and maintain our ecosystem.



"There is no more powerful message in the 21st century than climate change. There is no more powerful vehicle for communicating and delivering such a message to children than the performing and creative arts." So . . . Inspire—Create—Enjoy!

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TEACHING NOTES

Where did the story come from?

It's interesting being asked to write to order. We do this to children all the time. I find that it can help to recycle previous characters, settings and plot patterns. In this case, I used Skater, a character who has appeared in quite a few of my stories. Over the years, I've got to know him well, which makes it easier when writing, because I don't have to spend time developing his character. I know that he is independent, resilient, clever, brave and kindly. It's worth letting children into this writing secret - you can write lots of stories reusing your favourite character, setting or create a 'what happens next' after the end of a previous story.

I knew that I wanted to write a story that included a dragon. Partly because I have just completed a book about teaching using mythical creatures such as dragons, unicorns, ogres and elves, but also because I wanted to loiter on the description of the dragon.

This story is based around the simple idea of a magical portal. In this case, I have used a mirror that can be 'stepped through'. I also included a 'time slip' where the story shifts back to explain how Skater had found himself in this mythical world. Look at how the story moves back and forth in time. This can be shown on a timeline or flow chart.

The way in which I've written the story lays open the possibility of much more. Who is Valjean-Krakanova? (The name was invented by Clover from John Moore Primary School.) What is the crystal room? The ending invites a new story to follow on from this episode. What happens if Skater steps back through the mirror? Pupils could write a prequel that explains how Krakanova captured Skater.

Drama and writing

Read the descriptions of the dragon at the start and towards the end of the story. Get the children to create a quick sketch of the dragon and label this with the phrases used. Then, working solo or in pairs, give children time to develop descriptive sentences for different parts of the dragon, using new ideas and images. These should start with the words, 'I am'. Stand in a circle and, pair by pair, step into the ring and say aloud your 'I am' sentence to create a

class list poem, e.g.

I am the fiery eyes glittering inside the charred skull like ghastly lanterns.

I am the jagged jaws, opening to reveal yellow-stained teeth.

I am the gnarled claws, curved like scimitars.

Reading as a reader

- In the description of the dragon, how does the writer create the effect of something dangerous?
- Explain 'he had stepped out of the frying pan into a furnace'.
- Explain 'grim determination, incarceration and husbandry'.
- When Skater and Safia climbed the mountain, how did they know they were safe?
- What do you think 'the unfortunate events in Pudding Lane' might have been?
- Discuss what Valjean-Krakanova means by 'light fingers'.
- What can you infer from the final paragraph?

Preparing to write

It's worth spending time before writing a dragon story, developing the description of what type of dragon it will feature. In this model of a report about a snow dragon, you can see how the sentence starters and features can help the writer develop descriptive ideas. The details can then be drawn upon when writing the narrative.

Would you be able to recognise a Snow Dragon if you saw one? In fact, they are very similar to the large majority of dragons. Like most dragons, they have a long horn, the body of a horse and excellent eyesight. Typically, they are an amazing white colour which glitters as their hair catches the sunlight. However, a few have been spotted which are a light green colour. This allows them to blend in amongst forest vegetation. Furthermore, they have amazing teeth made of diamonds and their tails consist of icy, silver hair. The main feature of the Snow Dragon is that it freezes anything that it touches. Amazingly, they scatter flakes of snow as they move along.



The Book of Dragons by Pie and Mel Corbett is available from the Talk for Writing Bookshop.

shop.talk4writing.com

SCHOOL STORAGE

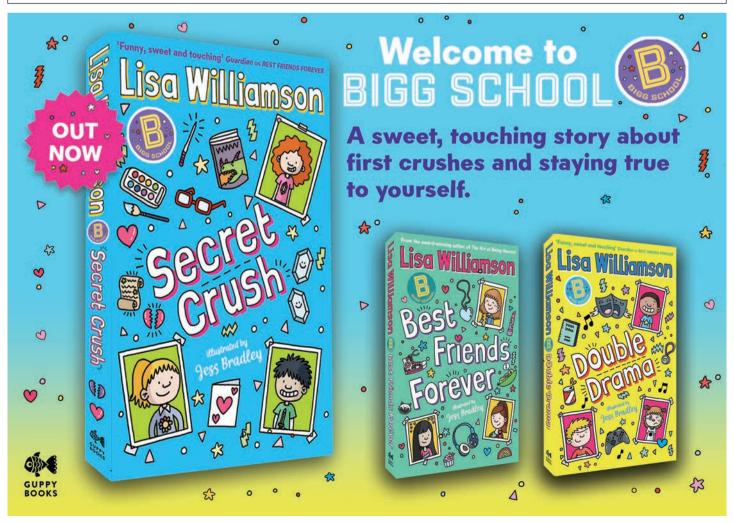
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THE CRAFT

Let's bring motivation, enjoyment and authentic writing purpose back into our classrooms, say **Ellen Counter** and **Juliet McCullion**

itting down to write can be daunting. There's a blank screen in front of us, a few ideas in our heads – and the impetus to write. We note down a plan and general structure, and ideas begin to blossom, but tving them together takes time. As adults, we likely have the privilege of reading many articles, so we know why they're written and what makes them enjoyable to read. Yet, it's not always easy to marry those things together to get to the finished product. Ideas bounce around our heads, words and phrases appear in our mind, but it takes care, motivation, and the many steps of the writing process to get to the publishable result. It's a hugely complex and demanding skill. Not only this, but writing places great demands on our emotional resources alongside the cognitive requirements.

As teachers, we place writing demands on children every day in school. To do something so demanding, pupils need to feel that writing is a worthwhile pursuit – they have to be motivated, volitional, autonomous and confident writers. If they are going to leave a little piece of themselves on the page – an insight into their identity for scrutiny – then there had better be good reason to do so.

As Young & Ferguson state: 'Emotionally healthy young writers are able to produce better texts because they have secure writerly knowledge (cognitive resources) to draw on, they know how to manage the processes involved in



"To do something so demanding, pupils need to feel that writing is a worthwhile pursuit"

writing, and they can use and apply a variety of writerly techniques'.

We know that there has been a stark decline in the percentage of children and young people in the UK who are volitional writers. In June 2023, the National Literacy Trust produced results from its latest survey, which showed that only 34.6 per cent of children and young people aged between eight and 18 enjoyed writing in their free time.

In 2023, 71 per cent of pupils met the expected standard in writing, down from 78 per cent in 2019.

The good news

Despite these gloomy figures, there is hope. An

increasing demand for research-informed writing teaching is blossoming, led by the clarion call of Ross Young and Felicity Ferguson at The Writing for Pleasure Centre, and other hugely influential academic researchers. In a recent article, written by Debra Myhill, Teresa Cremin and Lucy Oliver, entitled Writing as Craft: Reconsidering Teacher Subject Content Knowledge for Teaching Writing, the authors suggest that there is a distinct lack of empirical evidence concerning what constitutes teacher subject knowledge for writing. They propose reframing writing as a 'craft' rather than a subject, and suggest five key themes of

writing craft knowledge. We've outlined and expanded on these in the panel overleaf.

Whilst we cannot go into details for all of these areas, let's briefly focus on the three text-oriented themes: the reader-writer relationship; language choices; text-level choices. In other words (and this is a huge simplification!) how can we write effectively based on our purpose for writing, and how we want our reader to feel/think/do/understand? Following on from that, what language and text choices can we select to do this?

The national curriculum currently does not help teachers to understand the craft of writing. Statements such as 'In narratives, create characters, settings and plot' offer up no guidance as to how a writer would go about bringing a character to life, or the techniques writers use to construct a vivid setting. This lack of direction



often leads to writing being skewed towards box-ticking of grammar terms and punctuation (sometimes leaving out the craft of composition entirely). Consequently, in many classrooms, the authentic craft of writing remains a mystery to all involved.

However, within its aims, the national curriculum does emphasise the importance of an awareness of purpose and audience. There are various suggestions for a range of writing purposes, but we could broadly categorise them as writing to: entertain, inform, persuade, discuss.

Michael Tidd has previously blogged about his approach to devising a writing curriculum using these four writing purposes (tinyurl.com/tp-Purpose). Of course, these can overlap, but there is usually an overriding one at play. Carefully constructed writing curriculums should support children in building an understanding of writing for different purposes, and enable them to connect with their audience as a writer, and provide them with opportunities to make choices

about their writing.

When pupils start to notice that different writers use similar writerly techniques according to their writing purpose, they can start to build writing schemas alongside a developing understanding of genre knowledge.

For example, pupils can observe that when writing to persuade, we often:

- Use 'you' to put the reader on the spot and make them think about what we are saying or asking.
- Use carefully-selected facts to support our opinions.
- Sometimes use rhetorical questions to make the reader think more deeply about a subject.
- Sometimes use emotion or exaggeration to make a point more memorable or emotive.

When they notice that writers often use adverts, letters, posters or reviews when writing to persuade, pupils will be able to match appropriate persuasive devices and genres for their writing purpose. (See tinyurl. com/tp-LanguageChoices for an illustrated example).

Putting it into practice

Curriculum design should therefore be carefully crafted to allow children to recognise that their language choices do not exist in a vacuum, and they can return to their knowledge of writing purpose to transfer this into different contexts (such as a variety of genres) and make links to any new learning. Not only within English lessons, but across the curriculum, with conscious control and choice.

Of course, we need to combine an understanding of both the cognitive and emotional demands that are placed on children when they are learning to write. Both domains must inform our decisions when creating any sort of writing curriculum within schools. We must include children in the decision-making concerning their writing making writing an enjoyable experience for them along with feeling a sense of satisfaction in their own high-quality creations (Young & Ferguson, 2021). As Michael Rosen states in his book Did I Hear You Write? (1989, p. 43): '...language

WRITING AS A CRAFT

Writer-orientated themes

- The writing process

 idea generation,
 planning, drafting, editing,
 proofreading, publishing.
- Being an author living the writer's life, writerly habits.

Text-orientated themes

- Text-level choices general knowledge.
- Language choices composition, sentence- and word-level choices, grammar and punctuation selection.
- The reader-writer relationship knowledge of writing purpose, being able to link language choices to have the intended effect on the reader.

doesn't have to seem like A Thing; something that doesn't belong to you; or something that isn't part of how you think. Rather, it is a way of thinking you can control'. TP



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Brightstorm

Set forth on an epic adventure with Vashti Hardy's exciting story of exploration

JON BIDDLE

hen Vashti Hardy released her debut book, Brightstorm, in 2018, there was a genuine sense of excitement in the children's book community. Comparisons were made to other popular steampunk titles such as Philip Reeve's Mortal Engines series and Airborn by Kenneth Oppel. The book went on to be nominated for several awards, including the 2019 Waterstone's Children's Book Prize and the 2019 Blue Peter Book Awards.

Brightstorm is an energetic and high-paced adventure story featuring a pair of 12-year-old twins, Arthur and Maudie, whose life takes a dreadful turn when they learn that their father, Ernest Brightstorm, has been reported dead on his expedition to reach South Polaris on the Third Continent. Their family's reputation is also tainted, perhaps forever, when he is accused of stealing the fuel from the ship of another explorer by Eudora Vane, a rival sky-ship captain. With no other

way of restoring their father's reputation, the twins join the crew of Captain Harriet Culpepper's sky-ship, The Aurora, in an attempt to reach South Polaris and clear the Brightstorm name.

As they depart Lontown and begin their journey to the Third Continent, the twins meet several fascinating characters, including a pack of thought-wolves, the wonderfully named Felicity Wiggety, and King Batzorig and King Temur from the Citadel, who all play important roles in helping the children on their quest.



Book topic

However, as they fly further away from the safety of the First Continent, they realise that they're not the only crew in the race, and the odds look increasingly stacked against them...

It's an ideal book to read with a Year 5/6 class, as the action starts almost immediately and doesn't let up. Pupils quickly begin to side with the Brightstorm twins, and are often outraged by the injustice of the situation the children find themselves in. The chapters are short and punchy, with more being revealed about the Brightstorm world and characters as the story moves forward. The cast of characters is relatively small, but this works in the book's favour, as the personality and motivation of each of them receives enough time in the spotlight.

The story's ending beautifully sets up the sequels, *Darkwhispers* and *Firesong*, which pupils are often desperate to read immediately after *Brightstorm*. There's also now a fourth book in the series, *Serpent of the Sands*, which features some favourite characters from the third book but can also be read as a stand-alone story.

Activities

Although the main reason for reading *Brightstorm* is simply the fact that it's a wonderfully engaging book, it can be used as inspiration for some exciting curriculum opportunities. It could also act as a springboard into a topic on explorers and exploration.

Front cover

Using the front cover as an opening point for discussion can often engage and excite the pupils before they even start reading. Brightstorm's front cover is perfect for this as it includes several clues about the story. Using a variation of the 'Tell Me' grid by Aidan Chambers (things I observe, wonder and infer), will lead to lots of excited speculation about what's inside.

How is Ernest Brightstorm perceived?

After having read the first few chapters, it quickly becomes clear that Arthur and Maudie's opinion of their father is very different from that of the general public. Asking questions such as, "Was Ernest Brightstorm a good explorer?", "Was he a good father?", "How did he die?" and "How might he be remembered?" can provide some interesting conversation starters. The pupils will probably have several other suggestions. The book also provides a chance to talk about fake news and how the media can influence what people think.

Applying to join the crew of The Aurora

The job advert on page 61 of the book is based on Ernest Shackleton's famous advert, which featured in London newspapers in the early 20th century. (There is now significant debate about whether the original advert is actually genuine, as nobody is



able to find the newspaper in which it allegedly appeared.) Getting pupils to think about the skills and experience needed to join a dangerous expedition to South Polaris is a great chance for them to produce some high-quality

persuasive writing, especially when a clear structure is provided (why I'm applying for the job, the skills I have, my relevant experience, what I can add to the crew, etc) and the type of formal language needed is modelled.

Expedition equipment

Once the children's applications to join The Aurora have been successful and they're part of the crew, it's time to start thinking about the equipment that they'll need on the journey. I've

Take it further

POETRY ABOUT ARRIVING ON THE THIRD CONTINENT

There are some stunning videos available online which are taken from ships arriving in Antarctica for the first time. Watching these with the pupils and then coming up with related vocabulary lists (what I saw, what I heard, how I felt) as a class can provide inspiration for poetry based around Arthur and Maudie's first experiences of South Polaris.

INVESTIGATE POLAR EXPLORERS

Most people have some knowledge of Scott, Amundsen and Shackleton, three of the more famous polar explorers, but there are many lesser-known figures whose stories are equally interesting. Matthew Henson (now commonly believed to be the first person to reach the North Pole, in 1909) was, until quite recently, marginalised in history books due to his ethnicity. His story can be

discovered in the gripping short novel *Race* to the *Frozen North* by Catherine Johnson.

Female explorers such as Ingrid
Christensen, the first woman to visit
Antarctica, and Ann Bancroft, the first
woman to reach both poles and to ski across
Antarctica, also offer fascinating life stories.
Providing the children with names of polar
explorers and then showing them how to do
research and then create a fact file or
timeline of their lives would help provide
some real-life context around the book and
the world of exploration.



previously found that splitting it into three categories – clothing, navigation and survival – helps them to focus their thoughts and ideas. In addition, restricting them to a maximum of ten or twelve items usually ensures that nobody tries to sneak in an Xbox or PlayStation 5. Not always, admittedly, but usually.

Working with a learning partner can lead to some passionate debate about what is considered essential and what isn't. If the children are struggling to get started, suggest some items such as sunglasses (to prevent sun glare), a compass, ropes (to help pull people out of crevasses) and something to light fires with. However, pupils are normally full of suggestions and find trimming their list quite a challenge.

Explorer's journal

Non-fiction books Against the Odds by Alastair Humphries and Explorers by Nellie Huang are a fantastic starting point for creating an explorer's journal. Once the expedition sets sail, writing either as one of the twins or as another member of the crew can lead to an impressive piece of work that builds up as the story progresses. Writing longer entries when something significant happens in the book, alongside shorter entries which detail day-to-day life on board The Aurora, will help ensure that interest and enthusiasm is maintained. Recounts are a style of writing that the children will be very familiar with, and they should be able to attempt the task with a good level of confidence.

Creating a sky-ship

Books such as *Sky High!* by Jacek Ambrozewski and *Planes* by Jan Van Der Waken are full of incredible illustrations showing the evolution of flying machines over the past century. Sharing the artwork with the children and then encouraging them to draw and design their own sky-ships can take work based on the book in an entirely new direction. They can design the exterior and interior of the ship, label it with technical details such as top speed, fuel and flying height, work out how many crew members they'll need wwto operate it and much more.

Thought-wolves

For me, one of the most interesting characters in the story is Tuyok, the brave and valiant leader of the thought-wolves, who rescues the children on more than one occasion. Writing an account of a rescue – or of an incident unrelated to the main quest – from his point of view could be challenging, but it would also produce writing full of empathy and compassion.

Loved this? Try these...

- Sky Song by Abi Elphinstone
- ❖ Northern Lights by Philip Pullman
- ❖ The Elemental Detectives by Patrice Lawrence
- ❖ Wolf Brother by Michelle Paver
- ❖ The Polar Bear Explorers' Club by Alex Bell
- ♦ Cogheart by Peter Bunzl

New villain

Creating a new character for an existing story is always enjoyable, even more so if it's a dastardly villain. Does Eudora Vane have a partner in crime? Is there an even more cunning member of the Geographical Society with an even more despicable plot up their sleeve? Do Arthur and Maudie have a long-lost sibling eveing up their inheritance? Because there's so much potential in the world that Vashti has created, there are numerous ways that a new antagonist could fit in. Pupils can draw their new villain and then annotate the image with key words that describe them. They could create a new backstory which explains why they have villainous tendencies, and write an account of one of their most wicked schemes - this could also be done in the form of a comic strip, where graphic novels such as Lightfall by Tim Probert can provide extra inspiration. TP



Jon Biddle is an experienced primary school teacher and English lead. Winner of the 2018 Reading for Pleasure Experienced Teacher

of the Year award, he coordinates the national Patron of Reading initiative.

GEOGRAPHY

Opportunities here include linking the book to map work and to climates around the world. One activity that is always successful is getting the children to draw the as yet undiscovered Fourth Continent. They need to consider the environment (polar, desert, mountainous, forest, volcanic), whether or not it is inhabited, the wildlife that might be found there and any potential dangers that explorers might face. Depending on the time available, they could write stories based around what they have created.

RSHE IDEAS

Brightstorm addresses some issues that would make a basis for valuable RSHE lessons. For example, Maudie is assertive, scientific and fearless, whereas Arthur is generally quieter and more sensitive. Arthur also has a mechanical arm, which was designed and built by his sister. You could thus explore topics such as challenging gender stereotypes and increasing disability awareness.

The importance of teamwork and cooperation is a thread that runs through

the entire book, and is something that could be related to real-life situations the children encounter. There are also some events and elements in the story that can be linked to the damage that humans are doing to the natural environment.

As well as the ideas suggested above, Hardy has provided lots of resources based on the books in the series, including maps and posters, so do make sure you and your pupils find the time to visit her website, vashtihardy.com

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Shoulda, woulda, COULDA

Emma Cate Stokes explains how modal verbs can help pupils produce persuasive writing that packs a real punch

s educators, we're always looking for innovative ways to teach language concepts. Modal verbs, those crucial parts of English grammar, are no exception. So, let's dive in and explore some examples of the modal verbs your KS2 pupils will be expected to know and use.

What are modal verbs?

Modal verbs are special verbs that modify other verbs, adding layers of meaning like possibility, ability, obligation or necessity.

because they don't follow the usual verb conjugation rules, and lack suffixes. Understanding them is essential if pupils are to express themselves clearly and appropriately

Different types of modal verbs and their applications

Possibility

Verbs such as could and would encompass advice and direction, and express personal actions and intents. They add a layer of uncertainty or potential to statements, making them suitable for discussing possibilities and promises. These are versatile in guiding others and describing one's actions or plans.

Prohibition

Modal verbs such as must and should, that express obligation and necessity, are crucial for giving clear and direct instructions. They are often used to assertively guide a reader or listener, providing unambiguous directions for specific actions or behaviours in various situations.

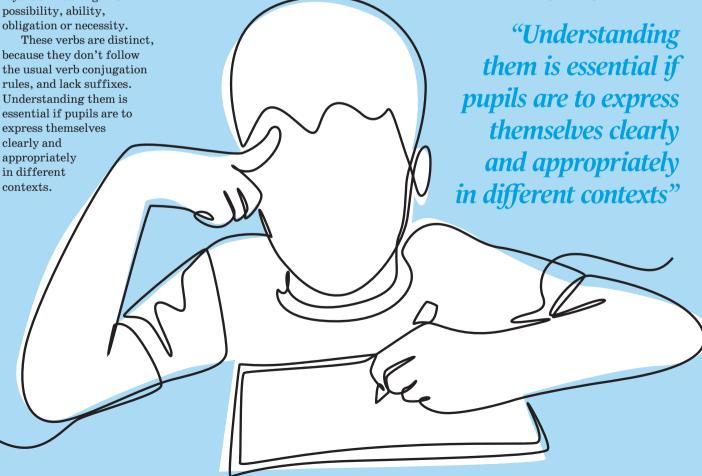
Suggestion

Verbs and verb phrases such as could, ought to and had better can be used to imply advice or suggest actions.

They are typically used in contexts where a more diplomatic or conversational tone is appropriate, avoiding the directness of a command.

Ability

Modal verbs can also be used to express someone's skill or competence in doing something. Can often indicates a general ability, while *could* can suggest a more conditional or past ability. For example, 'I can swim' shows current ability, whereas 'I could swim when I was younger' implies an ability in the past.



Modal verb	Application	Example
Can/could	Ability or possibility	She can solve complex problems
May/might	Permission or likelihood	You may start the test now
Must/ought to	Obligation or advice	You must finish your homework
Shall/will	Future actions or offers	We shall discuss this tomorrow
Should	Advice or expectation	You should check your work

Table 1. Examples of modal verbs

Permission

May and can are used to give or seek permission. May is more formal and polite, often used in official or respectful requests, like 'May I leave the room?'.

Can, on the other hand, is more informal, and commonly used in everyday situations, as in 'Can I borrow your pen?'.

Conditional verbs

Typically used in hypothetical or conditional statements, conditional verbs include would and could.

Would is often used to talk about choices or actions under specific conditions, e.g. 'I would travel if I had more time'. Could indicates possibility under certain conditions, as in 'If I finish my work early, I could go to the party.'

Persuasive writing

Modal verbs, as auxiliary elements in a sentence, play a unique role in shaping the tone and intent of the main verb. They are the subtle vet powerful tools that can turn a simple statement of fact into one of necessity, possibility, permission, or conviction.

In persuasive writing, their usage becomes even more significant. When a modal verb like must or will is introduced, it does more than just support the main verb; it transforms the sentence into a stronger, more compelling statement.

For instance, saving 'You must consider...' instead of just, 'Consider...' lends an air of urgency and authority to the suggestion. It's no longer just an

option; it becomes almost an imperative, nudging the reader or listener towards a particular stance or action.

When it comes to crafting arguments that will resonate with an audience, modal verbs are crucial. In using them, pupils will be able to articulate their points with greater clarity and conviction. They help pupils articulate their points with greater clarity and conviction.

For example, using modal verbs like could or might in a debate or persuasive essay introduces possibilities and hypothetical scenarios, inviting readers to consider alternatives or consequences.

When we teach children to use these verbs skillfully, we aren't merely ticking a box for the KS2 SATs; we're empowering them with the ability to express their opinions persuasively, and with confidence. You can find lots more modal verb activities at tinyurl. com/tp-modal TP





Stokes is a freelancewriter and former primary teacher.

Emma

@emmccatt

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Modal verb charades

Ask children to act out scenarios using modal verbs. For example, a pupil pretends to be locked out of their house. Classmates guess, "You can't get in!" or, "You must find your key!".

Modal verb storytelling

Create a story together, where each sentence must contain a modal verb. For example, start with "Once upon a time, a wizard could turn anything to gold". Each student then adds a sentence.

Role-play dialogues

Pupils pair up and engage in conversations using modal verbs. Provide scenarios like asking for permission. giving advice, or making predictions. For example, one child asks, "May I borrow your book?" and the other responds, "You should return it tomorrow."

Modal verb debate

Organise debates on light-hearted topics. Pupils must use modal verbs in their arguments, for example, "You should consider..." or "We must not forget..." So, you might debate 'School uniforms should be mandatory.' Children can then use sentences like "Pupils must express individuality."

Create your own modal verb rules

Ask children to make up a fictional world with unique rules that use modal verbs. E.g., 'In this world, people must hop on one foot when happy.' or 'You must sing to greet someone.'

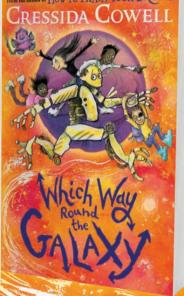
Modal verb quiz show

Host a quiz where pupils must answer questions using modal verbs, or identify the modal verb in a sentence. For example, "Which modal verb completes this sentence correctly? 'You quiet in the library."

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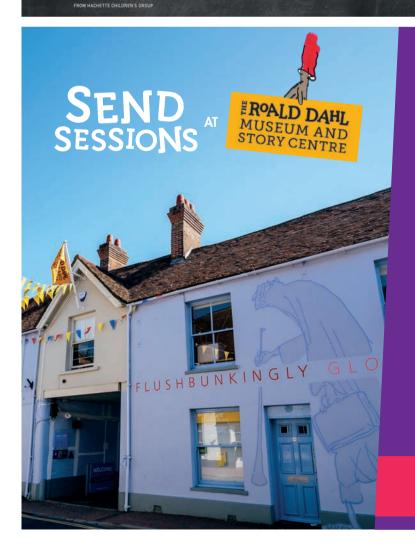
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Changing our view OF WORDS

Christopher Youles takes a fresh look at teaching vocabulary for narrative writing

n classrooms, you see words everywhere. Laminated word lists are plastered on every wall. Words are written in special pen on the windows. Thesauruses and dictionaries are stacked on shelves. Our schools are awash with words from the books we read, to the lessons we teach and the conversations we have. So, how do we choose which words to focus on? How can you teach pupils to use the best words in their writing and be precise in their vocabulary choices?

Good practice

If we want to improve our pupils' knowledge of language, and equip them with words with which to charge into battle, we need to be organised and smart. Most of all, we must teach children how to be independent in their word choices.

I've sat with fellow educators who were wowed by a piece of writing for its 'gorgeous' word choices, while I was concerned by its grammatical and sentence construction errors. I've also seen teachers highlight the use of 'said' as a weakness, while I've wanted to scream that 'said' is a perfectly good choice. "I want to suck your blood!" postulated the vampire' is poor writing.

Let's look at three invented samples from a Year 6 pupil:

- **A:** The ancient man looked at the boy and gave him an evil look.
- B: The decrepit man, wearing a white crimplene shirt and tan

trousers, surveyed the boy with a maniacal, withering look.

C: The old man gave the boy a withering look.

Which sentence works best? And, yes, this depends on the sentence's context and purpose, but for now, let's just choose. What's your gut reaction?

purpose: I want the old man to intimidate the boy and make him feel small.

This old man is an incidental character who will not be in the story again. Now let's examine each sentence again with this purpose in mind.

The ancient man looked at the boy and gave him an evil look

"I believe we should focus spelling on words that could be applied in multiple contexts"

I would pick C as the best option. A would follow in second, and B third. However, time and time again, it seems that the overwritten sentences, like B, garner the most praise.

Let's give this sentence a

'Ancient man' implies that he is some sort of pre-history Neanderthal. If he's old, let's just say that.

Also, 'evil' doesn't quite fit the purpose that the more precise word choice of 'withering' does. The decrepit man, wearing a white crimplene shirt and tan trousers, surveyed the boy with a maniacal, withering look.

Why 'decrepit'? This is an adjective meaning infirm or in bad condition. I could instead show this through the man using a walking stick or having a frail body, tired eyes or thin, white, wispy hair.

Is the fact that he is wearing a crimplene shirt and tan trousers important? If so, great! But I'm going to guess that the choice to describe his clothes is an arbitrary one here.

'Surveyed' means to look carefully, but this contradicts the 'withering look'. And 'maniacal' means he looks like he's suffering from mania. (Beatlemania? Wrestlemania?) He is delivering three looks at



	MEDUSA				
	Hair	Body	Eyes		
Nouns	serpents	skin	pupils		
	snakes	claws	irises		
	reptiles	talons			
	tongue(s)	wings			
Verbs	writhe	scrape	stare		
	hiss	extend	pierce		
	flick		scan		
	snap		observe		
	slither				
	wriggle				
Adjectives	venomous	leathery	stony		
	poisonous	scaly	green		
	deadly	grey	red		
	forked	pale	purple		
	serpentine		heartless		

Table 1. A bespoke word list

once: surveying, maniacal and withering. That's impressive facial mobility for a 'decrepit' man.

The old man gave the boy a withering look.

This does the job. 'The old man' defines the subject (we could describe him more if he were an important character). I wanted the boy to be intimidated and to feel small, and the 'withering look' does this job. It won't win the Booker Prize, but it's simple and effective.

We need to model this sort of discussion about language choices in class.

This will help create writers who are discerning in their vocabulary choices, and who put purpose at the forefront of their vocabulary decisions.

'Wow words' and vocab

One of the most common pieces of feedback I've seen in pupils' English books is to up-level their vocabulary — adding more detail or inserting a 'wow' word. To children, though, this tends to mean grabbing a thesaurus and replacing it with a word that they've never heard of, impressing their teacher and their peers with their newfound lexical powers.

So, how should we improve pupils' vocabulary if we do not use a thesaurus? To start, I would use bespoke word lists. Create two lists: one for all the key vocabulary they'll need for the story they're writing; one for the additional words that will push their writing on, with ambitious choices for the key scenes in the story.

Building a bespoke word list

Recently, my class has been writing their own versions of the ancient Greek myth *Perseus and the Gorgons*. Before we began, I wrote up the vocabulary that lists the

main character names, key locations and any other words related to the story, e.g. Perseus, Gorgon (Medusa), King Acrisius (King of Argos), Danae, King Polydectes, etc. This gave the children every opportunity to get the names right. I've seen lists like this given out as spelling homework before, but I believe we should focus spelling on words that could be applied in multiple contexts.

Now that the basic story-related words have been dealt with, we must think about the more ambitious words we want to teach.

For this, I create a bespoke word list, in table format (see Table 1.). You can make a single list for the whole story, or pick out key scenes and produce separate word lists for each one.

Place the word types on the left, and then set out the subjects in columns. In this example I have used a single subject, but you could have up to five or six. The columns can then be subdivided further to focus on specific aspects of a subject.

Discuss and finalise your word selections with the class – I've given an example of this process in the panel. These word lists give pupils a precise set to choose from. The lists can also teach pupils new words and extend their writing vocabulary.



Chris
Youles is
the author
of the
bestselling
books
Sentence

Models for Creative Writing and Teaching Story Writing in Primary. A classroom teacher with 19 years of experience, he has been an assistant head, English lead, writing moderator and a specialist leader in education.

BUILDING A BESPOKE WORD LIST

When compiling your vocabulary, list nouns first, verbs second and adjectives third. This doesn't presume a level of importance to the word types, but encourages pupils to start with precise nouns rather than weak adjectives. For example, 'Medusa's long, pointy, scratchy fingers' can be replaced with 'Medusa's talons'.

Next, we have verbs, because we want to create dynamism and action in our scene. Writing in the active voice will always be more powerful for narrative, and using a verb with a noun can achieve this.

Adjectives can add a shade of meaning that enhances the noun. The adjectives should not be doing the heavy lifting here. 'Medusa had revolting, mouldy snakes on her head' is not as effective as 'Medusa's head was a nest of writhing snakes'.

Adjectives should be used precisely. 'Medusa's stony eyes searched for Perseus' is far more effective than 'Medusa had disgusting eyes'.

If appropriate, I also build a short list of adverbs that could be used, but only if they enhance the image. 'Medusa evilly stared at Perseus' is better with a more precise verb choice: 'Medusa observed Perseus with her stony eyes.'

The key here in these discussions you will have with your pupils is that there is never one correct answer. This rich discussion when choosing our words is essential to improving writing.





On the COVER

Our featured book this issue is a beautiful story of one girl's vital and mystical quest

hen the mighty goddess Ganga hears a forgotten melody in the night, she follows its tune to a palace in the icy Himalayas, and to a young girl called Anya.

The deity has a quest for Anya – she needs her help to heal our fragile world.

Featuring magical artwork by the renowned illustrator Jane Ray, Anya's Quest by Jasbinder Bilan is an enchanting tale of a young girl's journey to protect the planet.

Jasbinder Bilan won the Costa Children's Book Award 2019 for her debut novel, *Asha and the Spirit Bird*. Born on a farm close to the Himalayas, she grew up in Nottingham, and spent many happy hours playing with her cousins in the open spaces around the city.

Anya's Quest is out now in hardback (£10.99, Walker Books).

"The earth's lullaby is falling silent.
Our world is in danger..."

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With a new instalment on the bestsellers list, *Inkheart* author **Cornelia Funke** and publisher **Barry Cunningham** share the story of a beloved book series...

TRW: It's been 21 years since *Inkheart* was first published in the UK. Can you tell us a little about when and how you first started working together?

Barry: Well, it's a famous story in *our* world, but it comes back to readers. Because it all started with a young girl writing to tell me that a book she had read in Germany was just as good as *Harry Potter*. She listed the ingredients – just like a cake! – and I was intrigued... So then I discovered Cornelia Funke and *The Thief Lord*, which was the first book we worked on together.

Later, we collaborated on many more — and finally on the *ultimate* book series for young readers, *Inkheart*. It's a series that is all about reading: characters go in and out of stories, influencing their lives, loves and judgements. And the books pose the question, *Can our favourite stories help us to rewrite our own?*

Cornelia: Well, my first memory is a message coming out of my fax machine. Yes, that's how long Barry and I have been working together! It came from a publisher who claimed to look like Bob Hoskins (the actor who I had based Victor in *The Thief Lord* on) and that this resemblance, along with the name of his publishing house, proved we were destined to work together.

I honestly didn't believe the Bob Hoskins part – though I have to say there is a resemblance. But Chicken House... hm, that was an intriguing name, as the series that made me famous in Germany is called *The Wild Chicks*, and I have owned chickens for many years.

TRW: Have there been any particularly memorable moments over the last 21 years of working together?

Barry: Many, many! Of marathon signing sessions, of *New York Times* number one bestsellers and all that razzamatazz. But there are two or three big ones: the wonderful young readers who tell Cornelia that they keep her books under their pillows so that they can dream together; the beautiful drives in the Hollywood hills, listening to Cornelia speak about her love of nature and art. And, of course, memories of editing with Cornelia. Her writing

magic – that won't be tied down and insists on telling her stories the way the characters want it.

Cornelia: What can I add to this glorious and very flattering answer? No-one knows more about music than Barry, and I remember an unforgettable visit to his house, discussing who sang the best cover version of Hallelujah. His home gives you the feeling that you climbed into an enchanted story and whispers of a passion for books in every corner. I remember walking through London, being still quite a young, inexperienced writer and so grateful to have Barry by my side, ignoring the mistakes of my school English and giving me the courage to talk to journalists and sales reps.





When did you realise that the series was becoming very popular?

Barry: As a publisher, it was fascinating seeing the power of storytelling spread itself; through word of mouth, and through readers' networks before the internet was all-powerful. But I believe it was principally through booksellers, librarians and teachers, who saw children's own enchantment when they read Cornelia's words and wanted to bring that to more readers.

Cornelia: The same is true of *Inkworld* in Germany. It was made a success by the readers and booksellers. There is no better promotion for a book than readers telling their friends of a book they loved. I am still deeply touched when readers in India or Mexico quote lines from *Inkworld* and make me realise how many of them have been travelling with me and my words. This connection with the readers and the journeys we go on together, granted by passionate publishers and booksellers, is a deep and quite mysterious magic.

TRW. *Inkdeath*, the last instalment in the series, was published in 2007; when did the idea of the fourth novel in the series, *The Colour of Revenge* begin?

Barry: Cornelia and I had always talked about Dustfinger, and whether there was more of his story to be told. And then one day she said, "What if...?" Cornelia: In fact, Barry planted the seeds for the fourth book by asking me for a short story, to be added to a new edition of *Inkworld*. I wrote it and the door was open again. I knew already then that there was so much more waiting behind that door, and one day I had to step through.

TRW. What has it been like returning to the world of *Inkheart* again after such a long time?

Cornelia: Oh it was wonderful to be back. I hadn't realised how much I missed them all. And I always wished to write more about the friendship between Dustfinger and the Black Prince. Of course, the story surprised me many times and with many turns, and it was the first of all my books where, in the end, I didn't want to leave.

What has the reaction been to the return of the series after so many years?

Barry: Huge! The

Colour of Revenge is a number one bestseller on both adult and children's lists in Germany, and in the UK and USA there's been a big reaction from people who grew up with the *Inkheart* series. Cornelia: I will never forget presenting the book at Frankfurt Book Fair. So much passion! So many, often teary, readers telling me how much this book means to them and that it came at just the right time, giving them hope in a world that grew so dark. I had, of course, wished for that, but only the readers will tell whether the storyteller

TRW: The books are translated from German to English. Are there any challenges around this?

did her job properly.

Barry: After the sad passing of Cornelia's long-time translator, Anthea Bell, we tested out a number of new translators – but finally chose Cornelia's daughter Anna. She not only gives the readers a brilliant taste of Cornelia's writing style but a modern feel of character too.

Cornelia: My daughter Anna has been my fiercest and best editor since she was five, and by now I cannot imagine working on any book without her being my first reader. She had a vast influence on this book: long before she became its translator, as she helped me untangle a few threads and proved to be an even more insightful editor than my very good German editor. When I read her translation, I had a ridiculously happy smile on my face. She made the German text sing and gave it new English clothes that fit perfectly and at the same time brought a freshness and youth that fits the story so perfectly.

TRW: Have any conversations with young readers ever influenced the direction in which you take your books?

Barry: From my point of view, I do listen to readers, but I always want to exceed their expectations – and dream bigger.

Cornelia: That's for sure a goal I share. And yes, I had many suggestions and requests from readers that inspired more thought, and sometimes more attention to a motive or character. I did, though, always ignore one wish brought by many readers: that Meggie needs to end up with Farid. I knew he would not make her happy. Doria, in contrast, would for sure.



Cornelia Funke is the critically acclaimed and internationally bestselling author of the Inkheart trilogy, the Dragon Rider

series and, most recently, Pan's Labyrinth, with Guillermo del Toro.

cornelia.funke.official corneliafunke.com



Barry Cunningham, OBE, has worked with authors including Roald Dahl and Spike Milligan, and signed JK Rowling

for Bloomsbury. In 2000, he founded his own company, Chicken House, which publishes original children's books, with a special emphasis on new fiction.



The Colour of Revenge by Cornelia Funke is out now in hardback (£14.99, Chicken House).

Building new WRITERS

Carefully chosen scaffolding strategies can bring writing success for EAL and multilingual learners, says **Iva Miteva**

ave you ever had to write a poem using rhyming words; or a story with a clear beginning, middle and end using powerful adjectives? Or an essay using similes and alliteration? What if you had to do it in a foreign language? What would you struggle with? What would help you express your thoughts? On many occasions in my practice as an EAL specialist, I have realised that developing and improving writing skills for EAL learners in a school context is often the least popular and the most difficult language skill to become proficient in. Yet it is so crucial.

In our teaching practice, we consistently see that mastering successful writing skills in more than one language can boost confidence, creativity and communication skills, lead to improved language acquisition, and improve a learner's chances of success both academically and later in life.

Mastering writing can bring challenges for teachers and EAL learners alike in the classroom, though. Some of my multilingual learners took a month before they felt confident enough to write a paragraph of five simple sentences on the popular topic of 'superheroes'. This

despite being provided with spelling support, keyword mats with visuals, and sentence starters.

Common writing challenges for EAL learners

When learning to write, multilingual learners often face various difficulties that might have linguistic or cultural roots. To begin with, compared to other languages, English spelling is complex. Focusing on teaching spelling rules and eliminating careless errors as early as possible in a child's school career will help improve the quality and fluency of their writing.

EAL learners have very limited vocabulary at first and, naturally, their sentences might sound repetitive and too simple. Due to the lack of acquired vocabulary, they struggle to express themselves or find the appropriate words, e.g. 'there is no place in the hall' instead of 'there is no room in the hall'. Grammatical structures including word order, tenses, prepositions or subject-verb agreement might also differ significantly from the learners' home language.

There can also be discrepancies between English and the home language in what is expected with regard to content and layout when writing essays, non-chronological reports and newspaper articles. This can lead to incoherent paragraphs and disjointed ideas, with incorrect transition words.

How many of us actually double-check that the EAL learners in our classroom have understood the writing task and the prompts? These learners can struggle to fully comprehend what is expected of them and might write off-topic due to unfamiliar and subject-specific vocabulary in the written instructions.

Multilingual learners will also often need longer to plan, draft and edit their writing compared to native speakers as they try to use the whole of their language repertoire to navigate a written task successfully. Luckily, there are several scaffolding strategies that can be used to effectively support the different stages of EAL learners' writing development.

Pre-writing strategies

When introducing a new genre of writing, draw on children's prior learning, and discuss the similarities and differences between this and other styles and genres with which they're already familiar.

Pre-teach spelling patterns and the meaning of unfamiliar keywords explicitly,

"Provide writing frames such as substitution tables"

Pronoun	Verb	Article	Noun	Adverb
ı	touched	the	door	gently.
He	opened		window	quickly.
She	closed		book	slowly.
We	moved		chair	quietly.
They			table	noisily.

Table 1. An example of a simple substitution table

and provide visuals, key vocabulary lists and punctuation guidance. Before the children begin their own compositions, show them examples of a completed piece of writing, to model expectations and structure. You can then help them to approach their writing task confidently by breaking it down into more manageable chunks, e.g. brainstorm > plan > draft > edit.

During-writing strategies

Paired or group writing activities will allow pupils to use their more fluent peers as models for language development as they plan, draft and edit their writing. Remember too that translation software can help if a child is struggling to find the words they need.

Provide writing frames such as substitution tables, graphic organisers and sentence starters. These will help EAL learners develop their ideas in a coherent way.

A substitution table presents words and phrases in a table format, with different columns for each part of a sentence, e.g.

subject, verb, object, article, adjective (see Table 1.). This helps break down complex sentence structures into more manageable chunks. The children can then create grammatically correct and meaningful sentences more easily, to use when speaking or writing.

I've used substitution tables successfully in my EAL interventions and I have created many more to support class differentiation. I do urge you to try them out – you can create your own using Learning Village's sentence analyser tool (learningvillage.net).

Post-writing strategies

Make sure you give immediate feedback on writing, and provide time for reflection, selfevaluation and response. For example, ask the children to consider what they did well, and what three things they could do to improve their writing in terms of grammar, word choice and content. Peer review and feedback is also useful provide structured checklists to ensure that responses are useful and respectful.

Finally, celebrate pupils' progress by getting them to share their work with a wider audience. This could be in your school newsletter,

or – for children who are confident speakers – as a live or prerecorded talk.

> is an EAL specialist with Learning Village (learning

Iva Miteva

village.net). She has taught multilingual learners for 18 years and has led the EAL provision in many schools as head of EAL.

The benefits of substitution tables

Clear sentence structures: Mixing and matching the words from the different columns to create grammatically correct sentences reinforces the correct use of grammar and syntax in a controlled way.

Simple choices: Pupils choose from limited options of vocabulary and language structures, which reduces the stress of thinking about grammar and word order. This provides more freedom for learners to focus on content and meaning and reduces grammatical errors.

Vocabulary and grammar improvement: The children can experiment with new words within existing grammar structures, which gives them more confidence in their writing.

Sentence variety: A substitution table allows learners to use different combinations of words and phrases to create sentences with a varied structure and length. It encourages pupils to move beyond basic sentence structures.

Customisation:

Substitution tables can be customised according to children's abilities and needs, and EAL learners of different proficiency levels will have the appropriate scaffolded support for writing.

Easy feedback: Teachers can spot grammatical errors quickly and correct them accordingly. This immediate feedback helps prevent common grammatical and context errors.

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LITERACY

Literacy Tree

A complete book-based platform for primary schools



AT A GLANCE

- A complete book-based approach to teaching the English curriculum
- High quality and authentic children's literature resources
- A practical approach to teaching a text-based curriculum, full of strategies and ideas for immediate classroom use
- Teach Primary and Bett winners

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL





A complete book-based approach to teaching English makes perfect sense as developing a love of reading is one of the most effective ways a school can raise attainment.

If you are looking to oxygenate children's learning through great literature then Literacy Tree have the air supply you need to improve attainment, health and wellbeing, and creativity across the curriculum.

Their 'Teach Through a Text' approach is about creating a thriving reading and writing culture by putting great novels, poetry collections, and high-quality non-fiction books at the very heart of English teaching, transforming children's attitudes to literacy and having a positive impact on learning.

They provide everything you need, with techniques and activities to teach grammar, punctuation, spelling, comprehension and writing. They also offer plenty of support and guidance on planning lessons and units for meaningful layered learning including mixed aged planning. Resources can be used as a complete scheme of work or adopted and adapted to suit accordingly. Access superb classroom toolkits, book lists, literature reviews, curriculum tips and home learning guidance.

Literacy Tree's approach is incredibly well-planned and thought through, with detailed guidance written by experts. They provide book-based planning sequences called Writing Roots that engage children to discover and take on the mantel of the expert helping them to write with clear audience and purpose. Everything sits under a literary theme and children journey through whole books and so upgrade their comprehension

skills progressively as part of their critical readers training.

What I like the most is the way Literacy Tree have embedded a real sense of community through their site with an authentic purpose of communicating information and shared experiences in relation to texts, activities and displays with

The thinking behind the resources places the learner centre stage and builds their self-efficacy by ensuring success in reading and writing.

Supporting all this, Literacy Tree have carefully selected an impressive range and breadth of authors, illustrators and genres to help teachers ensure progression within and across year groups. Here you will find a richness, diversity, flexibility and choice combined with an unremitting focus upon, and immersion in, reading for pleasure. Their free Curriculum Maps are impressive and showcase all the books on offer, books that are right, relevant and full of representation.

In addition to their sumptuous suite of books, Literacy Tree have also designed and built a completely free and easy-to-access downloadable app for annotating, capturing and assessing work.

Training and support are readily available with regular online training sessions and planning surgeries for subject leaders, senior leaders and classroom teachers implementing resources.

This is teaching English by the book. It lays the foundations for you to build and embed a reading and writing culture and community in the fabric of your school.





VERDICT

- ✓ The complete thematic book-based approach to improving literacy standards
- ✓ A platform full of responsibility, rigour and relevance
- Celebrates reading and writing giving both a high profile
- ✓ Superb planning notes and gilt-edged guidance
- ✓ Puts quality children's literature at the very heart of literacy learning
- ✓ Fosters a whole school love of oracy, reading and writing
- ✓ Enables children to become competent, confident and critical readers, writers and viewers of texts
- ✓ Encourages children to become life-long readers and writers
- ✓ App included to save teachers time

UPGRADE IF...

You are looking to teach the whole English curriculum creatively through quality children's literature and raise engagement and attainment in language, vocabulary, reading and writing.

See literacytree.com for pricing information.

ENGLISH

The Five Minute Box

A practical and comprehensive addition to your teaching arsenal



AT A GLANCE

- A structured multi-sensory phonics programme and screening tool for potential Specific Learning Difficulties
- Designed to be delivered by teaching assistants
- Covers the first stages of phonics
- Supplements class teaching
- Gives children ownership of their own learning

REVIEWED BY: JOHN DABELL



When it comes to literacy interventions, what matters the most is how well pupils are targeted, assessed, and monitored within the framework of a particular programme. Although there can never be a single universally effective programme, some interventions do manage to work effectively for a sizeable number of pupils. One such literacy intervention is the recently updated Five Minute Box, a proven system for teaching early literacy skills providing high quality phonic work to ease reading difficulties.

This is really a sturdy, plastic valise of practical literacy resources packed together to help with confidence, reduce anxiety and help pupils to keep up and master early literacy. It's an easy-to-use and practical toolkit that is designed for direct 1:1 support for 'at risk' children with the aim of helping them improve their knowledge, understanding and attainment. As it is intended for individual tuition, children don't have to worry about group dynamics or the fear of failure in front of their peers. It's especially useful for helping children with dyslexia, developmental language disorder and social and emotional needs and allows for progress to be made at different rates.

What makes the Five Minute Box so good to use is that it is geared up for explicit and systematic teaching delivered in brief, but intensive, structured interventions. This means it provides clear models for positive and supportive learning using an array of examples proven to teach reading, writing, spelling, handwriting and literacy skills. Inside the case you get a newly updated 39-page resource book containing all you need to know about the box and how to get the most out of it. This includes the benefits and key points, initial assessments,

teaching sessions, lesson plans, structured reading and spelling programme, and further assessments.

Also in the case you will find all of the hands-on materials you need for each lesson, including magnetic alphabet letters, sounds board, keyword cards and boards, handwriting formation board, record of achievement forms, record of work sheets, whiteboard and pen. As the materials are in one place, this helps save any preparation time and maximises time for actual teaching. There's a very handy fold-out instruction guide as well, which condenses the key information into easily digestible sections. The resource itself requires little in the way of preparation apart from familiarising yourself with the lesson plans and materials, so this is very much an 'open the box and get started' resource. Affordable training is also available if staff require it. Lessons are taught in small chunks, and each session covers a sounds board, keyword cards and personal information. The lesson plans included are all clearly set out in a step-by-step format using a 'Hear it, Say it, Read it, Write it, Read it again' approach. There are activities in phonics, keyword reading, spelling and writing and the box is intended for use in class rather than taking children out.

The Five Minute Box is not a box of tricks. It's a structured intervention toolkit of child-focused activities that allows all learners acquire secure phonic knowledge and literacy skills via short and impactful lessons that focus their attention and keep them involved. An intervention doesn't have to take hours to be effective, and The Five Minute Box proves that early intervention in short, focused bursts can really accelerate children's catch-up growth and be a rewarding not overwhelming experience.

teach PRIMARY

VERDICT

- Ideal support for dyslexic or second-language learners
- Gives pupils the phonic skills and confidence they need to succeed
- ✓ Gives pupils multisensory support to learn new strategies and skills
- ✓ Provides chances to think aloud and talk about their learning and decisions
- ✓ Provides pupils with extensive feedback, self-esteem, motivation to learn and self-help strategies
- Provides valuable data and easy to monitor by SENCo

UPGRADE IF...

...you are looking for a highly effective early intervention and screening tool that identifies strengths and gaps in learning, engages children, supports their independent learning and gives an accurate record of progress.

Ready Steady Write!

Better writing outcomes, reduced teacher workloads

30 SECOND BRIEFING An award-winning

An award-winning structured, evidence-based writing resource for EYFS to Year 6. It improves writing outcomes and reduces teacher workload, offering ready-made lesson plans and consistent, high-quality writing instruction across all year groups.

TRANSFORM WRITING OUTCOMES ACROSS YOUR SCHOOL

Ready Steady Write is an award-winning, evidence-based resource designed to raise standards in writing from EYFS to Year 6. By using high-quality literature at its core, it ensures a structured progression of skills through the clear sequence of Immerse, Analyse, Plan, Write. This approach fosters a deep understanding of writing and significantly improves outcomes, helping students develop as confident, capable writers, from early language acquisition to more advanced composition.

PROMOTE ORACY SKILLS FOR STRONGER WRITING

Strong writing begins with strong verbal expression. Ready Steady Write emphasises oracy development through book talk and drama activities, helping students articulate their thoughts before putting pen to paper. For EYFS and Year 1, tools like Story Songs and Story Friends (Octopus Opening, Build Up Bear, Problem Penguin and Elephant Ending) make story structures more accessible and engaging, improving both verbal and written outcomes.

ADAPTIVE TEACHING - SUPPORTING THE LOWEST 20 PER CENT, SEND, AND EAL LEARNERS

Ready Steady Write is designed to support all learners, including those in the lowest 20 per cent, SEND, and EAL



children. Its focus on vocabulary development (supported by visual aids) and sentence accuracy ensures that all children can access the curriculum using our guidance documentation. This flexibility helps teachers and leaders close gaps in attainment, thereby raising outcomes for all.

REDUCED TEACHER AND LEADER WORKLOAD

Effective teaching should not come at the cost of excessive workload. Ready Steady Write provides pre-prepared lesson plans, Example Texts, Daily Sentence Accuracy Work, soundscapes, image galleries and contextualised grammar, saving teachers time and effort. Leaders benefit from tools such as





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literacycounts.
co.uk

assessment and progression documentation, non-negotiables, and successful implementation guidance etc, which helps monitor progress across all year groups.

SUPPORT FOR WHOLE-SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Ready Steady Write offers structured support for school-wide writing improvement, ensuring consistency across all year groups. Skills build progressively to meet national curriculum expectations. Our expert consultancy team provides in-school professional development for teachers and supports leadership teams in maintaining high standards whilst fostering a culture of high-quality writing.

KEY POINTS

Research-informed approach:
Our teaching sequence of
Immerse, Analyse, Plan, Write
helps children understand
how writing works, enabling a
clear footprint of learning in
their books.

Tailored support:
Resources and guidance
to support the lowest
20 per cent, SEND, and
EAL learners, ensuring
very child can access
and succeed.

Time-saving resources:
A comprehensive
suite of interactive
resources to reduce
planning time, so teachers
can focus on teaching!

School-wide impact:
Our comprehensive support
for leaders and teachers
ensures consistency in
teaching and progression
across all year groups.















We Improve Outcomes in Reading and Writing

www.literacycounts.co.uk hello@literacycounts.co.uk



See why over **97,000 children** are developing a love of writing with

Ready Steady Write



Email hello@literacycounts.co.uk for free sample access of these resources.

Literacy

COMMITS





Free four-week reading pilot

this autumn term!

We invite schools to join a free trial of DreamBox Reading Plus the adaptive online reading development programme.

The four-week pilot will:

- Reinforce classroom learning.
- Identify students' skills gaps and determine if they are below, at, or above the expected standard.
- Improve reading speed, comprehension, and vocabulary.

"Reading Plus is an extremely effective programme for fluency and reading comprehension. We can clearly see the impact this will have in accessing the end-of-vear KS2 tests."



Heather March

Director of Teaching and Learning, Aim High Academy Trust



Ready to start?

We're confident that the improvements you'll see during the pilot will demonstrate Reading Plus's value as a long-term solution.

Scan the QR code to request a free pilot.







